Academic Board
Wednesday 3 March 2021

MINUTES

Present: Dr Michael Spence, President and Provost (Chair).

Professor Bas Aarts; Dr Ali Abolfathi; Professor Daniel Alexander; Professor David Alexander; Mr Adnan Ali; Dr Mark Altaweel; Professor Lynn Ang; Professor Panagiota Angeli; Dr Seth Anziska; Ms Wendy Appleby; Dr Manuel Arroyo-Kalin; Professor Jonathan Ashmore; Professor David Atkinson; Professor David Attwell; Ms Marie Augustin; Dr Paul Ayris; Dr Dominik Bach; Professor Jurg Bahler; Professor Maryse Bailly; Professor James Bainbridge; Dr Emily Baker; Professor Stavroula Balabani; Professor Torsten Baldegweg; Dr Simon Banks; Professor Yolande Barnes; Professor Kathryn Batchelor; Professor Gill Bates; Dr Cecile Bats; Professor Rachel Batterham; Professor Polina Bayvel; Mr Ayman Benmati; Professor Michael Berkowitz; Professor Michael Berkowitz; Professor Nadia Berthouze; Professor Jeff Bezemer; Professor Zoltan Biedermann; Professor Robert Biel; Professor Stephanie Bird; Dr Matthew Blain; Professor Brad Blitz; Professor David Bogle; Professor Iain Borden; Professor Douglas Bourn; Professor Rachel Bowly; Professor Daniel Bracewell; Professor Annie Britton; Dr Geraldine Brodie; Ms Annabel Brown; Professor Jamie Brown; Professor Dan Browne; Professor Robert Brownstone; Professor Eric Brunner; Professor Stella Bruzzi; Dr Suzy Buckley; Professor Richard Bucknall; Professor Vishwanie Budhram-Mahadeo; Professor Jonathan Butterworth; Mr Tadhg Caffrey; Professor Joseph Cain; Mr Simon Cane; Professor Licia Capra; Professor Claire Carmalt; Dr Alisia Carnemolla; Dr Declan Chard; Professor Michael Cheetham; Professor Andrew Cherish; Professor James Cheshire; Professor Kwang Choy; Dr Evangelia Chrysikou; Professor Lucie Clapp; Professor Beverley Clark; Professor Andrew Coates; Professor John Collinge; Professor Susan Collins; Professor Claire Colomb; Professor Barbara Conradt; Professor Anthony Costello; Professor Duncan Craig; Ms Sonja Curtis; Professor Caroline Daly; Professor Izzat Darwazeh; Professor Nathan Davies; Professor Sally Day; Professor Dina D’Ayala; Professor Bert De Reyck; Professor Rohan de Silva; Professor Andreas Demosthenous; Professor Snezana Djordjevic; Professor Paul Dodds; Professor Annette Dolphin; Ms Dominique Drai; Professor Michael Duchen; Professor Sandra Dunsmuir; Professor Frances Edwards; Professor Piet Eeckhout; Professor Mark Emberton; Ms Ecem Ergin; Dr Russell Evans; Professor Susan Evans; Ms Pascale Fanning-Tichborne; Ms Ava Fatah; Professor Andrew Fazakerley; Professor Federico Federici; Professor Delmiro Fernandez-Reyes; Dr Liory Fern-Pollak; Professor Patrizia Ferretti; Professor Margot Finn; Professor Andrew Fisher; Professor Elizabeth Fisher; Dr Andrew Flinn; Mr James Ford; Professor Eric Fraga;

1 This meeting was held via videoconference due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
In attendance: Dr Clare Goudy; Mr Nick McGhee (Secretary); Ms Sian Minett; Mr Derfel Owen; Mr Dean Stokes; Ms Olivia Whiteley.

Apologies: Dr Nicole Brown; Professor Marc-Olivier Coppens; Professor Andrew Davenport; Professor Simon Dixon; Professor Paulo Drinot; Professor Peter Earley; Professor Helen Hackett; Dr John Kelsey; Ms Sarah Lasoye; Professor Annemaree Lloyd; Professor Gesine Manuwald; Ms Laure Montangerand; Dr Dafne Zuleima Morgado Ramirez; Professor John Mullan; Professor Sarah Spurgeon.
Part I: Preliminary Formal Business

34 ACADEMIC BOARD MINUTES

34.1 The minutes of the AB meeting of 10 February 2021 [AB Minutes 22-33, 2020-21] were confirmed, subject to the following amendments (addition of underlined text):

Minute 25.4: The Working Group explained that it had put this experience at the heart of its attempt to identify the most viable position, and had drawn on it in proposing an extensive programme of educational measures.

Minute 25.5: The Working Group explained that its concerns were founded on their view that the IHRA definition was inadequate, and did not reflect a lack of concern for the lived experience of Jewish people.

Minute 25.7: A number of members expressed their concerns about the level of antisemitic behaviour reported by UCL students. Several members spoke of their concerns about how any move to retract the IHRA definition would be perceived and how it might impact communal cohesion. It was noted that the adoption of the definition had been welcomed by the majority of Jewish staff and students...

35 MATTERS ARISING

35.1 At a meeting on 18 February 2021 Council had approved AB’s recommendation for the amendment of the Regulations for Management to dispense with the cap of six consecutive years for the purposes of elected membership of the Board. The Regulations would be updated with effect from 1 April 2021.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

36 PROVOST’S BUSINESS (Paper 4-30)

36.1 An additional meeting of Academic Board would be arranged for Wednesday 17 March 2021 at 3pm, to discuss proposals for the membership of a working group to discuss definitions of antisemitism [AB minute 25.11, 2020-21].

37 2021/22 SCENARIOS (Paper 4-31)

37.1 Professor Geraint Rees, Dean of the Faculty of Life Sciences, introduced the paper.

37.2 Academic Board was invited to reflect on the scenarios, particularly with a view to testing their robustness. Their function was to support planning by way
of the consideration of hypothetical narratives. The scenarios should not be read as predictions.

37.3 It was likely that reality would reflect elements of all four scenarios described in the paper, although it appeared that Scenario C particularly resonated with current experience. A return to face-to-face teaching as set out in that scenario would constitute a significant challenge, not least in accommodating the high student intake of 2020.

37.4 The following observations were made during the ensuing discussion:

- The dissemination of scenarios was helpful in engaging the wider UCL community in the direction of travel and in providing staff with a basis for addressing the concerns of students and applicants. It also served to demonstrate the range of issues that were being actively considered.
- The scenarios needed to reflect the reality of a partially-vaccinated population for the rest of the calendar year.
- The scenarios drew attention to the benefits of planning academic content in a way that could be relatively easily and rapidly adapted to different forms of delivery.
- A number of assumptions were made about the impact of the pandemic on the economy, unemployment and travel. It was thought likely that, whatever the overall economic impact, international travel would continue to be significantly below pre-pandemic levels in the longer term. Members drew attention to UCL’s commitment to become a net zero carbon university by 2030. The pandemic had driven changes in behaviour which made such ambitions more realistic.
- University communities would be particularly vulnerable to outbreaks given the levels of individual travel and the nature of interactions between members. Test, trace and isolate systems would be especially important in preventing outbreaks from becoming waves against a background of relatively low levels of infection. UCL might usefully consider what such a system could look like within the university. Members noted also the social impact of such systems in changing thinking about the spread of disease.
- The broad-brush approach taken in the scenarios could not capture the very different experiences of individuals. Inequalities of opportunity during the pandemic needed to be addressed. Members urged that the scenarios reflect the longer-term impact on future cohorts of students whose education would have been seriously, if unevenly, disrupted.
- Members discussed the feasibility of a return to face-to-face delivery in view of the risk of new variants and overseas students hindered from travelling.
- Members were concerned about the impact of the pandemic on students’ mental health, and noted the benefits of any activity that drew them back to physical engagement with activities on campus. It was suggested that the scenarios should refer specifically to non-teaching student activity, and that this be reflected in communications.
- UCL’s London location had always been a significant draw for students. It was suggested that this may have been affected by the pandemic, but
also that the relative success of the UK’s vaccine rollout would have a positive impact.

- Regardless of the progress of the recovery from the pandemic, the expectations of individuals in terms of way of working would be fundamentally changed. The challenge to UCL would be to pivot to a more blended mixture of online and face-to-face teaching delivery. The discourse of inevitability should be resisted and the advantages of blended learning framed as a positive choice rather than merely the response to an emergency.

37.5 Professor Rees thanked Academic Board members for their comments and invited any further contributions to be sent to the Director of Planning, Dean Stokes.

38 EDUCATION PLANNING 2021-22 (Paper 4-32)

38.1 Professor Anthony Smith, Vice-Provost (Education and Student Affairs) and Professor Deborah Gill, Pro-Vice-Provost (Student Experience) introduced the paper, which set out the high-level principles informing a framework for departmental planning for the next academic year.

38.2 The key message of the principles was that UCL would be a campus-based university next year but with a strong emphasis on blended learning. Students would therefore need to come to the UK, although the reality was that not all teaching could be accommodated on campus. Face-to-face activity would need to focus on activity that was core to achieving the Learning Outcomes, or co-curricular activity with a community or social aspect that could not be delivered remotely.

38.3 The paper sought to balance pedagogical considerations with the considerable practical challenges involved in a return to face-to-face teaching. It was necessary to address these questions now as choices would need to be made and communications developed in good time for students.

38.4 Two modifications had been accepted since the paper was circulated:

- Removal of the need to plan for 2m social distancing in teaching spaces for the whole year. It was thought that this was likely to reflect government requirements and would make a significant difference to the options for use of the estate.
- The hard limit of 35 students for in-person classes would be amended to a guideline, as it was felt this would not necessarily encourage best use of the estate and staffing capacity and could not apply equally to all types of teaching.

38.5 The following observations were made during the ensuing discussion:
• AB noted the danger of failing to manage student expectations appropriately. It was vital that communications be clear and timely, and resist the temptation to be overoptimistic about the volume of face-to-face activity that was likely to be achievable. It was also important that the position be confirmed to admissions tutors as soon as possible in order to inform their discussions with applicants and the planning for open days.

• It was noted that the fundamental difference between 2021-22 and the current academic year was in the nature of the face-to-face activity, which was currently focussed on enrichment activity rather than the core activity intended for next year. It was recognised that given the uncertainty about how the pandemic will progress, there would always need to be the ability to pivot to fully remote teaching if lockdown requirements came into force.

• AB discussed the approach in the case of students who were unable to come to campus. There had been a significant number of requests for repeat online classes over the past year. It was important to be clear that in 2021/22, as before the pandemic, it would be necessary to come to London in order to meet the Learning Outcomes of the programme. It was recognised that this may mean that some individual students would need to consider interrupting their study.

• The vital importance of the provision of study spaces was noted, particularly for those students who were not able to study effectively at home. This presented a challenge on arrangements for return to working as office space in Bidborough House and 1-19 Torrington Place had been repurposed for student study.

• The logistical challenges in dealing with larger cohorts did not only relate to the question of maintaining suitable social distancing within lecture theatres, but also in ensuring that students could move about the campus and use ancillary facilities, such as cafes, safely. Experience over the past 12 months had demonstrated that, in some cases, alternatives to large-scale lectures could in fact be preferable.

• The importance of giving due consideration to staff morale was noted, not just in respect of the direct impact of the pandemic but also the consequent changes to the nature of work demands.

• The deadline for decisions about which modules would be running was approaching. Work was ongoing now on timetabling and the identification of what space could be made available. The question of guidance on the appropriate handling of shared instruments and other objects in a teaching setting was noted.

38.6 In summation, the Provost noted that staff had done an extraordinary job over the past year, but that it was important not to allow the pandemic to dictate the institution’s strategic decisions. The next academic year would be difficult to plan for on a number of key parameters. It was not possible to know to what extent life would return to normal, and there were differing expectations and appetites for risk amongst the UCL community. In respect of education planning, the key question was the set of principles set out in the paper, modified as reported by Professor Gill.
38.7 Academic Board was generally content to proceed on the basis of those principles. Members were invited to contact Professor Gill if they had any further comments.

Part III: Other Business for approval or Information

39 MINUTES OF OTHER COMMITTEES (Paper 4-33)

39.1 Academic Board received the minutes of other committees.

40 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

40.1 An additional meeting of Academic Board would be arranged for 17 March 2021 at 3.00-4.00pm.

40.2 The summer term meeting would be held on 12 May 2021 at 2.00-4.00pm.

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