

## ACADEMIC BOARD

Tuesday 14 June 2011

### MINUTES

*Key to abbreviations*

AB	Academic Board
BASc	Bachelor of Arts and Sciences
CPD	continuing professional development
GPA	Grade Point Average
HE	Higher Education
HEAR	Higher Education Achievement Record

43 **PROVOST'S GREEN PAPER**

*[AB Minute 35, 2010-11]*

***Reported***

- 43.1 It had been agreed at the Academic Board meeting of 25 May 2011, where the Provost introduced his Green Paper for 2011-2021, that arrangements would be made for one of the 'town meetings' at which members of the UCL community were invited to discuss the document to be designated a meeting of Academic Board. A mechanism would thus be created whereby AB could formally comment on the Green Paper.
- 43.2 The Green Paper, revised in light of discussion by Council on 19 May 2011, had been published at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/greenpaper/>
- 43.3 The Provost began by drawing attention to a statement from the 1826 Prospectus for UCL which advocated flexibility in regard to the subjects worthy of academic attention, and referred also to the benefits of what had since come to be known as interdisciplinarity.
- 43.4 The Green Paper had first been drafted in 2010, at a time when it was feared that higher education cuts in the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review would be so deep as to make closure of certain academic areas at UCL unavoidable. The funding outlook a year on was much more positive and a stable financial position was attainable, although UCL and other leading UK universities would still face major challenges in competing with the

- much higher levels of public investment in HE being made by other countries.
- 43.5 Under the student numbers arrangements now expected to be set out in the Government White Paper, due for publication on 27 June, the restriction on Home/EU student numbers would be lifted in respect of students with A-level grades of at least AAB, *ie* approximately 70% of UCL students. This change would be helpful to UCL in a number of ways. For example, it had been envisaged that the BAsc ‘liberal arts’ programme to be introduced in 2012, in order to admit approximately 80 students each year, would necessitate a corresponding reduction in student numbers elsewhere in UCL. The new regime would mean that UCL could admit as many students to the programme as it chose, without a negative impact elsewhere.
- 43.6 In theory, a funding model under which graduates were not required to pay back their loans until they had achieved an income of a sufficient level should not inspire significant debt aversion. In practice, however, this might well not be the case. In its Access Agreement for 2012-13, which had been submitted to the Office for Fair Access and was awaiting approval, UCL had undertaken to set aside 30% of its additional fee income to fund access measures.
- 43.7 There was a widespread public impression of a decimation of support for the arts and humanities in universities. While it was true that Government funding per student was being entirely withdrawn for these subjects, the reduction in per capita funding had been equal across all subjects. It would be incumbent on UCL to demonstrate that the rigour of a UCL education left all UCL graduates, irrespective of discipline, equally fit for employment.
- 43.8 With respect to the strategic aim of providing education imbued with world-leading research and delivered by academic staff at the top of their field, the Provost believed that further work was needed on the integration of research and teaching. In response to the Green Paper one correspondent had suggested that not all research staff were suited to teach. The Provost noted that the expectation of a teaching contribution should apply to all academic staff, though different approaches would be appropriate to different circumstances. Particularly outstanding research colleagues might not be expected, for example, to grade papers, but nonetheless had an important role to play in inspiring their students through their teaching contribution.
- 43.9 The Green Paper outlined a proposal to explore moving towards a semester model, in which the first semester would run from September to Christmas and the second from the New Year to Easter. Two alternative models had examinations scheduled either at the end of the first semester or on return in January.
- 43.10 The Green Paper raised the issue of whether the Honours Degree classification system was any longer the optimal system for UCL. The Grade Point Average (GPA) or similar was now the internationally dominant model. It was hoped that it might be possible to devise a system incorporating a GPA element alongside traditional

classification. The Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR), which recorded non-academic achievements, would be rolled out across the UK sector in 2011-12.

- 43.11 It was proposed that a review of postgraduate programmes and the Graduate School take place. It was noted that many UK graduates four years hence would have financial liabilities that would tend to discourage them from embarking on a graduate degree.
- 43.12 UCL's staff turnover was one of the lowest among major London employers and among UK HEIs. The most effective guarantee of maintaining that record was to achieve long-term financial stability. There would also be a need to deal sensitively with the withdrawal of the compulsory retirement age in September 2011. The Green Paper outlined proposals for a transformed approach to human resource management.
- 43.13 A further Town Hall meeting was scheduled for 21 June. Subject to the content of the Government's Higher Education White Paper, the revised Green Paper would then be submitted for approval to the Council meeting of 6 July with a view to its then being published as the Council's White Paper. The Provost invited comments from those present at the meeting, noting that a key purpose of the current consultation on the Green Paper was to gauge the UCL community's appetite for transformational change.

### ***Discussion***

- 43.14 The Provost confirmed that, if the Government White Paper confirmed the student numbers funding model that was currently expected, it would be for departments to decide whether they wished to raise their undergraduate student numbers. A business plan, setting out the staffing and estate implications of increasing student numbers, would be required before any such changes were authorised.
- 43.15 Student expectations regarding the recognition of UCL degrees overseas and the availability of interdisciplinary programmes had increased significantly in recent years. It was suggested that this was principally because of the rise in UCL's international profile. Although universities around the globe were standardising around the US model there were in the Provost's view certain traditional features of the British HE system that UCL would be ill-advised to abandon. These included the access of undergraduates to senior academic staff, and the progressive building of a degree programme year-on-year.
- 43.16 The Provost's optimism concerning demand for places at UCL was founded on the rise in applications in recent years, including from overseas, the increasing recognition of the UCL brand, the present currency position, and the global thirst for Higher Education generally, particularly in China. There were also grounds for optimism about the possibilities for expanding the contributions made by philanthropy.

- 43.17 In respect of the requirement on academic staff to teach, it was noted that the document *Excellence and the UCL Community – a shared endeavour*<sup>1</sup> already set out a clear definition of academic duties. Nevertheless, it was suggested that staff would welcome a further statement of the expectations regarding their teaching obligations. The Provost noted that practice varied widely between departments. Not all of what was classed as teaching was classroom-based activity; the development of new materials and laboratory work were cited as examples.
- 43.18 The potential for growth of the Bloomsbury campus was inevitably restricted, but a significant opportunity would arise through the disposal of estate in East London following the Olympics in 2012. Distance learning provided some additional options, notably for CPD activities.
- 43.19 The Provost concluded by asking that anyone with further comments on the Green Paper contact him at [provost@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:provost@ucl.ac.uk) or via the website at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/greenpaper/feedback>

TIM PERRY  
Director of Registry and Academic Services  
July 2011

[telephone 020 7679 2047; internal extension 32047; e-mail - [tim.perry@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:tim.perry@ucl.ac.uk)]

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/excellence/>