



Academic Board

Monday 30 May 2022¹

MINUTES

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

Professor Kathleen Armour, Professor Jonathan Ashmore, Professor David Atkinson, Professor David Attwell, Professor James Bainbridge, Professor Gianluca Baio, Professor Torsten Baldeweg, Professor Yolande Barnes, Professor Michael Berkowitz, Professor Robert Biel, Professor Stephanie Bird, Professor Brad Blitz, Professor Douglas Bourn, Professor Rachel Bowlby, Professor Annie Britton, Professor Geraldine Brodie, Professor Stella Bruzzi, Dr Suzy Buckley, Professor Vishwanie Budhram-Mahadeo, Professor Jonathan Butterworth, Professor Claire Cameron, Professor Licia Capra, Professor Madeline Carr, Professor Daren Caruana, Professor Richard Chandler, Dr Declan Chard, Professor Elaine Chase, Professor Joanna Chataway, Ms Andrey Chau, Professor Michael Cheetham, Dr Evangelia Chrysikou, Professor Beverley Clark, Professor D'Maris Coffman, Dr Alun Coker, Professor Susan Collins, Professor Claire Colomb, Professor Anthony Costello, Ms Sarah Cowls, Dr Sebastian Coxon, Ms Sonja Curtis, Professor Paul Dalby, Professor Izzat Darwazeh, Professor Sally Day, Professor Dina D'Ayala, Dr Elton Dias, Ms Dominique Draï, Professor Paulo Drinot, Professor Sandra Dunsmuir, Professor Ian Eames, Professor Frances Edwards, Professor Perry Elliott, Professor Susan Evans, Ms Pascale Fanning-Tichborne, Professor Andrew Fazakerley, Professor Delmiro Fernandez-Reyes, Dr Liory Fern-Pollak, Professor Patrizia Ferretti, Professor Margot Finn, Professor Andrew Fisher, Professor Elizabeth Fisher, Mr James Ford, Dr Bettina Friedrich, Dr Martin Fry, Professor Jonathan Gale, Professor Caroline Garaway, Professor Mark Geller, Professor Alasdair Gibb, Professor Adam Gibson, Professor Derek Gilroy, Ms Milena Gonakova, Dr Hugh Goodacre, Professor Eric Gordy, Professor Lewis Griffin, Dr Anne Grydehoj, Professor David Guile, Dr Lucia Patrizio Gunning, Professor Susan Hamilton, Mr Jesper Hansen, Professor Stephen Hart, Professor Adham Hashibon, Professor Michael Heinrich, Professor Mark Hewitson, Professor Evangelos Himonides, Dr Christine Hoffmann, Professor Jennifer Hudson, Professor Andrew Hudson-Smith, Professor Dan Jagger, Ms Liz Jones, Professor Tim Jordan, Professor Jasmina Jovanovic, Dr Thomas Kador, Professor Lily Kahn, Professor Jian Kang, Professor Catherine Keen, Mr Peter Kelly, Professor Yvonne Kelly, Dr John Kelsey, Professor Peng Khaw, Dr Maki Kimura, Professor Josef Kittler, Ms Edyta Kostanek, Mr Dimitrios Kraniotis, Dr Fiona Kyle, Professor Alena Ledeneva, Professor Louis Lemieux, Professor Li Wei, Mr Mutong Li, Professor Chaozong Liu, Professor David Lomas, Dr Helga Lúthersdóttir, Professor Ruth Mace, Dr Isobel Mackay, Professor

¹ This meeting was held via videoconference.

Sandy MacRobert, Professor Mairead MacSweeney, Professor Eleanor Main, Dr Nephtali Marina-Gonzalez, Dr Giulio Marini, Professor Sarah Matthews, Professor Manolis Mavrikis, Dr Margaret Mayston, Dr Claire McAndrew, Dr Ruth McGinity, Professor Anne McMunn, Professor Usha Menon, Professor Susan Michie, Professor Robert Mills, Professor John Mitchell, Ms Joanne Moles, Professor Ruth Morgan, Professor Rear Admiral Neil Morisetti, Professor Sharon Morris, Professor Gemma Moss, Professor Dejan Mumovic, Professor Veronique Munoz-Darde, Professor Mirco Musolesi, Ms Marga Navarrete, Dr Helene Neveu Kringelbach, Dr Mark Newman, Dr Will Newton, Professor Thanh Nguyen, Professor Nikolitsa Nomikou, Dr Abel Nyamapfene, Dr Ademola Odunsi, Professor Moses Oketch, Professor Martin Oliver, Professor Mathew Page, Professor Enrico Palandri, Professor Jenny Parkes, Professor Nora Pashayan, Professor James Phillips, Professor Ann Phoenix, Professor Hynek Pikhart, Dr Jeffrey Pittaway, Dr Stephen Potts, Professor David Pym, Dr Joana Ramalho, Professor Davide Ravasi, Professor Geraint Rees, Professor Antonella Riccio, Professor Mary Richardson, Professor Carol Rivas, Professor Aeli Roberts, Professor Helen Roberts, Professor Sasha Roseneil, Professor Michele Russell, Ms Fiona Ryland, Professor John Sabapathy, Dr Benet Salway, Professor Vieri Samek-Lodovici, Ms Heather Sampson, Dr Tim Scanlon, Professor Ralf Schoepfer, Professor Stephanie Schorge, Professor Eloise Scotford, Professor Mala Shah, Professor Lion Shahab, Professor Maryam Shahmanesh, Professor Sonu Shamdasani, Professor David Shanks, Dr Ala'a Shehabi, Professor Robert Sheil, Professor Elizabeth Shepherd, Ms Maria Sibiryakova, Mr Justin Siefker, Professor Bill Sillar, Professor Ricardo Silva, Professor Michael Singer, Professor Trevor Smart, Professor Sam Smidt, Mr Andy Smith, Professor Samuel Solomon, Professor Eva Sorensen, Professor Catalina Spataru, Professor Sarah Spurgeon, Professor Michael Stacey, Dr Uta Staiger, Dr Karen Stepanyan, Professor Claudio Stern, Professor Sacha Stern, Professor Michael Stewart, Dr Sherrill Stroschein, Ms Joanna Stroud, Professor Judith Suissa, Dr Mike Sulu, Dr Bugra Susler, Mr Bryan Taylor, Professor Alan Thompson, Professor Julian Thompson, Professor Ulrich Tiedau, Professor Nigel Titchener-Hooker, Professor Helena Titheridge, Professor John Tomaney, Ms Helen Tsui, Professor Rosemary Varley, Professor Laura Vaughan, Professor Steven Vaughan, Ms Marine-Oceane Verdez-Scholler, Dr Nalini Vittal, Ms Yasmin Walker, Ms Breege Whiten, Professor Edward Wild, Professor Amanda Williams, Professor Andrew Wills, Professor Duncan Wilson, Professor Selina Wray, Professor Ian Zachary, Professor Silvia Zane, Dr Vedran Zerjav, Professor Hua Zhu, Professor Stan Zochowski.

In attendance: Dr Clare Goudy, Mr Nick McGhee (Secretary), Ms Olivia Whiteley.

Apologies: Professor Simon Banks, Professor Henriette Moore, Professor Lorraine Noble, Professor Suzanne Ruddy, Professor Jolene Skordis.

Part I: Preliminary Formal Business

57 ACADEMIC BOARD MINUTES

57.1 The minutes of the AB meeting of 11 May 2022 [AB Minutes 46-56, 2021-22] were confirmed.

58 **MATTERS ARISING**

- 58.1 In respect of Minute 46.3 and the note circulated subsequently to members, it was confirmed that the question of the impact of the teaching model on neurodivergent staff was under consideration.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

59 **UCL STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-27: ENABLERS** (Paper 8-41)

- 59.1 In introducing the paper, the Vice-President (Operations) noted several of the key outcomes of the TOPS programme, including the establishment of the Professional Services Hub whilst achieving a financial return assessed at £76m as well as improved satisfaction levels. However the external context had changed significantly since that time, both as a result of changes to ways of working and in terms of the economic environment, and this presented a number of new challenges and opportunities.

- 59.2 The paper described a number of initiatives across five thematic areas. Members were invited to comment on these or to raise any other matters of concern which they felt might also be appropriately included.

- *Enabling excellence in research and innovation*
Key elements were the administration of research contracts and the support for innovation activity. The goal was to deliver support in this area through a unified structure with an end-to-end process owner, and to support efficiencies by bringing the necessary legal support in-house.
- *Enabling an excellent education and student experience*
Enhancement of the student admissions experience, which was slow and insufficiently personalised. The current system was unable to take advantage of the opportunities to achieve economies of scale as volume increased.
- *Recruiting, retaining and developing diverse talent*
The replacement of the ROME recruitment system in order to establish a more streamlined process, with a single process owner supported by an in-house recruitment team.
- *Better use of better space for staff and students*
There was insufficient room for teaching delivery despite many areas of the estate being under-utilised. Work on the Estates Masterplan, the Strategic Maintenance Plan and the Future of Work strategy was ongoing, with the goal of exiting from unsuitable leases.
- *Agile and adaptable financial and strategic planning*
Work was ongoing on a Financial Strategy and a zero-based budgeting exercise.

59.3 During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

- Members expressed concerns about the service provided by UCL’s current travel provider, and particularly the efficacy of the price matching arrangement for travel bookings. Members also raised the issue of accommodation costs, specifically the value for money presented by AirBnB which was not available through the travel provider. The Provost acknowledged these concerns, whilst noting the purchasing power that came with using a single supplier, as well as the importance of UCL being able to determine where staff were in the event of geopolitical turmoil. Members would be contacted following the meeting to invite feedback on this issue.
- Members debated the premise that the best provision was generally obtained by way of a single, effective, provider. The Provost noted that the costs arising as a result of fragmentation and duplication across the institution were significant but not necessarily visible to individuals.
- Members enquired after the arrangements in respect of any credit (such as air miles) to the institution arising from the use of a mandated, designated travel agency, as the issue had arisen at other institutions. The Vice-President (Operations) would look into this question.
- Members welcomed the commitment to a benchmark on research contract response times, noting that delay could be highly problematic in the context of complex global partnerships. Members noted a tendency to take a risk-averse approach to any legal questions in this area, and this had an inevitable impact on timeliness. It was hoped that a more efficient and standardised approach could be developed to deal with low-risk activity.
- In respect of timetabling, members urged the importance of considering the impact of the geography of the estate on time spent travelling between teaching events, as well as on the feasibility of using specialist teaching materials. These were the kinds of issues that would be picked up through academic impact statements.

59.4 The Chair invited comments on areas not addressed in the paper where members would like to see focussed improvements. Members noted that:

- the research ethics system was overstretched and could benefit from review, particularly in respect of its interaction with issues of data protection;
- the ventilation of teaching spaces could be addressed.
- The interaction between technical provision and the overlap with learning delivery was discussed. The *AssessmentUCL*² platform was intended to support the assessment process, but was not about assessment outcomes. Members highlighted the vital role of formative assessment on learning, and noted the potential value of peer interaction across the institution on pedagogical issues.

² <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/assessment-resources/assessmentucl-platform-and-project/assessmentucl-project>

- Members discussed their experiences with cases of apparent academic misconduct in assessment, and the need to consider this issue in assessment design.
- Members discussed the question of academic appeals on the basis of technical error (ie where a student had encountered technical issues in uploading answers to the system). It was noted that the institution investigated such incidents on a case-by-case basis and had all the necessary data to reach a conclusion. The Vice-Provost (Education and Student Experience) and the Vice-President (Operations) would liaise on the issue as there were questions of principle in this area that would require discussion by the Education Committee.
- The extent of in-house support for major IT platforms was raised. The model suggested by *InsideUCL*, whereby all staff had access to an app but only a small number directly to the system itself, was noted.

59.5 The Provost noted that it was essential to seek efficiencies in complex administrative processes, given that UCL was now in an environment where income growth was restricted through the cap on the home fee, but with high fixed costs and a limited ability to pass on significant cost inflation. There was significant variation in the amount of resource dedicated to particular types of activity in different areas of the institution. This could benefit from being reviewed and a benchmark established. There was a pressing need to address the backlog in maintenance and to address the question of support, particularly to junior staff, in the context of the cost of living crisis.

59.6 In view of the feedback from members the Provost took the view that it would be helpful to have a session at Academic Board periodically in which members had an open opportunity to raise issues of concern. The Provost would discuss that further with GCAB.

59.7 Any further comments should be sent to the Vice-President (Operations), with an indication of whether the author was willing for them to be published.

Part III: Other business for approval or information

60 MINUTES OF OTHER COMMITTEES (Paper 8-42)

60.1 Noted.

61 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

61.1 The dates of the Academic Board meetings in the academic year 2022/23 will be circulated in due course.

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