



ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

Thursday 17 October 2013

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Professor Anthony Smith (*Chair*)

Provost and President
Mr David Ashton
Professor David Bogle
Professor Robert Brown
Professor Richard Catlow
Dr Brenda Cross
Dr Caroline Essex
Dr Julie Evans
Professor Mike Ewing
Mr Marco Federighi
Professor Mary Fulbrook
Ms Tracy Herman
Dr Christine Hoffmann

Dr Arne Hofmann
Dr Helen Matthews
Professor Alan Penn
Professor David Price
Dr Peter Raven
Dr Hilary Richards
Professor Elizabeth Shephard
Dr Ruth Siddall
Dr Eva Sorensen
Ms Olga Thomas
Mr Ben Towse
Ms Soo Ware

In attendance: Mr Jason Clarke (Secretary); Mr Dominique Fourniol; Ms Clare Goudy; Ms Judith Hillmore; Ms Valerie Hogg; Professor Charles Mitchell (*vice* Professor Dame Hazel Genn).

Apologies for absence were received from: Dr Paul Ayris; Professor Steve Caddick; Professor Anthony Finkelstein; Mr Keir Gallagher; Professor Dame Hazel Genn; Dr Leonie Hannan; Mr Tim Perry; Ms Mary Rimington;

Key to abbreviations

AC	Academic Committee
DTC	Department Teaching Committee
EdCom	Education Committee
FTC	Faculty Teaching Committee
GPA	Grade Point Average
NSS	National Student Survey
OIA	Office of the Independent Adjudicator
PGTA	Postgraduate Teaching Assistant
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
SMT	Senior Management Team
StEF	Student Experience Forum
StRAC	Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee
UCLU	UCL Union

Preliminary Business

1 TERMS OF REFERENCE, CONSTITUTION AND 2013-14 MEMBERSHIP

Noted:

- 1.1 AC's terms of reference, constitution and 2013-14 membership at AC 1-1 (13-14).

Reported:

- 1.2 The Chair welcomed the Provost and Professor Fulbrook to their first meeting of AC, as well as the new student representatives from UCLU. The Chair also welcomed to the meeting Mr Fourniol, Ms Hogg and Professor Mitchell, who was representing Professor Dame Hazel Genn, who was away on UCL business.
- 1.3 The Chair reported that Professor David Green had stood down from the position of Vice-Dean (Education) within the School of Brain Sciences at the end of the 2012-13 session. On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Professor Green for his contribution to the work of AC and various subcommittees and working groups over many years.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 4 JULY 2013

Confirmed:

- 2.1 The Minutes of the meeting of AC held on 4 July 2013 [*AC Mins. 48-59, 4.7.13*].

3 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

3A Review of Academic Committee and its Substructure [*AC Min.55A, 4.7.13*]

Noted:

- 3A.1 At its meeting on 9 July 2013, Council had approved the final recommendations from AC for the establishment of the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee and the Student Experience Forum. Further information about the StRAC was available from the UCL committee web pages at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ras/acs/governance/committees> and details of the StEf were attached, for information, at AC 1-2 (13-14). Meetings of both groups in session 2013-14 were being canvassed.

3B Timetabling Review Group [*AC Min.54B, 4.7.13*]

Noted:

- 3B.1 Following discussions between the AC and EdCom officers, the final report of the Timetabling Review Group would be circulated to members of EdCom shortly and discussed by EdCom at its meeting on 26 November 2013. The Vice-Provost (Education)/AC Chair would be attending the EdCom meeting to present the Report.
- 3B.2 The Chair noted further that the issue of timetabling and room bookings was a high priority on his agenda and this would also be discussed by the StEF. On the issue of room bookings, the Provost observed that this issue had been raised with him in a number of meetings since he had taken up his appointment. There was, in his view, a need to look at this issue in a holistic way: as well as looking at the operation and resourcing of the central

room bookings office, there was also a need to look at the way in which departments used the room booking system to book space, especially large teaching spaces. It would also be important to identify any measures which could be put in place quickly to deliver immediate improvements to the operation of the room bookings system.

3C Academic Committee Working Group on the GPA [AC Min.51, 4.7.13]

Noted:

- 3C.1 The Chair reported that UCL had accepted an invitation from Sir Bob Burgess to participate in the national pilot of the GPA system which was being co-ordinated by the Higher Education Academy.

3D Academic Committee Working Group on Programme Review [AC Min.52, 4.7.13]

Noted:

- 3D.1 The Chair reported that good progress was being made by the Working Group in reviewing the purpose and operation of programme review within UCL's quality management and enhancement processes.

Business for Discussion

4 UCL'S PERFORMANCE IN THE NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

Received:

- 4.1 A report from the Vice-Provost (Education)/AC Chair on UCL's performance in the 2013 NSS at AC 1-3 (13-14).

Reported:

- 4.2 In presenting the above report, the Vice-Provost (Education)/AC Chair noted, *inter alia*, the following:
- The NSS has been in place since 2006. Consequently, it was possible to obtain longitudinal data showing UCL's results over a number of years, as well as comparative data on how UCL performs against the rest of the sector and, in particular, against peer institutions.
 - The NSS surveys undergraduate students in their final year and the results now feed into the Key Information Set that is made available to potential applicants. The NSS therefore now has a higher profile externally than was the case previously.
 - In the 2012 NSS, UCL's overall satisfaction rating had dropped three percentage points from 88% to 85%. In the 2013 NSS the overall satisfaction rating had dropped a further percentage point to 84%: two percentage points below the sector average. This meant that UCL was now ranked 100 out of 150 in the sector and 22 out of 24 in the Russell Group. 16 of UCL's 39 subject clusters were in the bottom quartile for their discipline. Furthermore, the written comments provided by individual students continued to record a wide variety of experiences, even on the same programme.
 - The worst result was again in relation to 'assessment and feedback' where UCL's satisfaction rate of 61% was 10 percentage points below the sector average. UCL's

ratings on assessment and feedback had flatlined since 2010, against an improvement across the sector. A review of UCL's Assessment Strategy, including a review of assessment practices across the institution, had been initiated. Also, it had been suggested that UCL was over-assessing its students compared to its peer institutions.

- The Vice-Provost (Education)'s Office had provided departments with breakdowns of their results and had asked departments to prepare action plans outlining the measures they intend to take in the current session to improve response rates and levels of student satisfaction. The Vice-Provost (Education)/AC Chair would be meeting with all those departments with results in the bottom quartile to discuss urgent action to be taken.
- AC was invited to consider other possible action that should be taken to improve UCL's performance for 2014 eg ways of improving the response rate to ensure a balanced return, strategies for ensuring that UCL's service standards for feedback on assessed work are implemented, the role that could be played by Personal Tutors, and the simplification of programme diets.

Discussion:

4.3 During the Committee's discussion of the above report, the following points, *inter alia*, were noted:

- The Provost commented that UCL's underperformance in the NSS was a major cause for concern and that concerted action was needed across the whole of UCL and at all levels of the university to address it. The potential reputational damage to UCL was considerable (eg being 22 out of 24 in the Russell Group for overall student satisfaction was not satisfactory) and could have an adverse impact on future student recruitment. There was a need for a cultural change within UCL to take the NSS more seriously: attempts to dismiss the NSS as unimportant were unacceptable and suggestions from some quarters that UCL should call for the NSS to be dropped were unrealistic; it was often forgotten that the NSS had been introduced as part of the changes to the national quality assurance framework which had seen the discontinuation of QAA Subject Review. The SMT had agreed that action to address UCL's poor performance in the NSS would be taken, as part of a wider process of change which sought to re-establish the importance of education within a highly successful research-intensive university. While there might be some immediate measures which could be taken to improve UCL's performance in the NSS, real change would only result from a concerted and sustained effort to improve the student experience at UCL, and hence UCL's NSS scores.
- Consideration should be given to UCL introducing an internal, pan-university questionnaire for students at the end of the first and/or second year of study, so that action can be taken to address students' concerns before they complete their programmes.
- More could be done to identify and then disseminate good practice in those departments which perform well in the NSS.
- It was suggested that experience elsewhere in the sector indicates that those universities and department which perform well in the NSS tend to be those that have effective student representation systems and mechanisms for responding to student feedback. The University of Glasgow was cited as one university which had decided to include student representatives on key management bodies at all levels of the university in order to ensure that the feedback loop was closed.

- The UCLU representatives supported the suggestion that students should be represented at all levels of the university and requested that student representatives be involved actively in the process of departments drawing-up NSS action plans.
- Strengthening the StARs system was seen by staff and student members of AC as an important way of improving the student representation system. It was suggested by the Provost that it might be more effective for the election of StARS to be co-ordinated by UCLU rather than departments and it was agreed that he and the Vice-Provost (Education)/AC Chair would explore this further with the UCLU officers.
- The UCLU representatives also expressed concern that UCL's service standards in relation to the provision of feedback on assessed work are not being adhered to. They also highlighted a number of issues (eg training and remuneration) relating to the increasing use being made by many departments of PGTA's to undertake teaching and marking.
- On the issue of programme diets, the Vice-Provost (Education)/AC Chair observed that while UCL has between 200-300 different programme titles at both undergraduate and postgraduate-taught levels, it has more than 10,000 active programme diets; of those, around 8,000 programme diets are each followed by a single student. Simplifying the number of programme diets might reduce administrative overheads and might release time for staff to concentrate on key tasks such as assessment and providing effective and timely feedback to students.
- The commitment from the SMT to take a lead on improving not just the NSS results but also the student experience more generally was welcomed by members of AC. A member of AC expressed the view that while members of DTCS and FTCs are aware of these issues, there was a need in some areas for a greater commitment on the part of heads of department to prioritise student- and teaching-related matters. On that theme, it was also suggested that a review and reform of promotion and reward structures was needed in order to give due recognition to the importance of teaching and education.
- It was suggested that the increasing demands being made on academic staff's time in terms of international engagement, entrepreneurial activities, knowledge transfer *etc* had meant that they did not have sufficient time to focus on their core academic responsibilities in relation to research and education (which included assessment of student work and providing feedback to them on their performance and progression).
- In drawing the discussion to a close, the Vice-Provost (Education)/AC Chair made the following observations: (i) it was accepted that there was a need to review the way in which UCL recognises and rewards teaching eg the criteria for the Provost's Teaching Awards had traditionally focussed on *innovations* in teaching, whereas in future there would be a much greater emphasis on *excellence* in teaching; (ii) there was a need to review the timing and range of module choices; the SMT had already committed to introducing earlier module selection in 2014-15 for the 2015-16 session and EdCom would be overseeing that initiative; and (iii) there was a need to review how UCL surveys students early on in their careers and how student satisfaction is captured across the full range of student services. AC would return to this issue at its March 2014 meeting once responses from departments, including action plans, had been received.

Other Business for Approval or Information

5 APPROVAL OF AMENDED TITLE FOR A NEW DEGREE AWARD: MASTERS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION [AC Min.32, 21.3.13]

Noted:

- 5.1 At its meeting on 21 March 2013, AC had approved, on the recommendation of EdCom, the creation of a new degree award: the *Executive Masters in Public Administration* or *Executive MPA*.
- 5.2 Following discussions between the School of Public Policy and relevant committee/administrative officers, the School had requested that the title of the new degree award be amended to *Masters in Public Administration* or *MPA*.

RESOLVED:

- 5.3 That AC approve formally the amendment of the title of the following new UCL degree award: *Masters in Public Administration* or *MPA*.

6 ANNUAL LETTER FROM THE OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT ADJUDICATOR

Noted:

- 6.1 The 2012 Annual letter from the OIA at AC 1-4 (12-13), with a covering note from the Deputy Registrar (Operations and Planning).

7 REPORTS OF SUB-COMMITTEES, WORKING GROUPS ETC OF ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

Noted:

- 7.1 The AC officers had received on behalf of AC, since the last meeting of AC, Minutes of the following:
- Education Committee - 25 June 2013;
 - Quality Management and Enhancement Committee - 18 June 2013.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted:

- 8.1 The next meeting will be on **Tuesday 10 December 2013** at **9.00am** in the **Old Refectory**.