



ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

Thursday 18 October 2012

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Professor Anthony Smith (*Chair*)

President and Provost	Professor Raymond MacAllister
Professor David Bogle	Ms Helen Matthews
Professor Robert Brown	Professor Alan Penn
Mr Edwin Clifford-Coupe	Mr Tim Perry
Dr Brenda Cross	Dr Hilary Richards
Dr Caroline Essex	Ms Mary Rimington
Dr Julie Evans	Dr Ruth Siddall
Professor Mike Ewing	Dr Eva Sorensen
Mr Marco Federighi	Ms Olga Thomas
Professor Anthony Finkelstein	Ms Susan Ware
Dr Christine Hoffmann	Professor Jonathan Wolff
Dr Arne Hofmann	

In attendance: Mr Jason Clarke (Secretary); Ms Judith Hillmore; Ms Harriet Lilley; Dr Stephen Price; Mr Rob Traynor.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr David Ashton, Dr Paul Ayris, Professor Steve Caddick, Ms Geraldine Davies, Dr Leonie Hannan, Mr Dante Micheaux, Professor David Price, Professor Alan Thompson, and Professor Michael Worton.

Key to abbreviations

AC	Academic Committee
A&H	Faculty of Arts and Humanities
CEO	Committee for Equal Opportunities
FBE	Faculty of the Built Environment
FLS	Faculty of Life Sciences
FTC	Faculty Teaching Committee
GPA	Grade Point Average
HEI	Higher Education Institution
KIS	Key Information Set
NSS	National Student Survey
UKBA	UK Border Agency

1 TERMS OF REFERENCE, CONSTITUTION AND 2012-13 MEMBERSHIP

Noted:

- 1.1 AC's terms of reference, constitution and 2012-13 membership at AC 1-1 (12-13).

Reported:

- 1.2 The AC Chair welcomed the following new members to AC:

- Professor Jonathan Wolff, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities;
- Dr Julie Evans, Faculty Tutor, Faculty of Brain Sciences;
- Mr Edwin Clifford-Coupe, Education and Campaigns Officer, UCL Union;
- Mr Dante Micheaux, Medical and Postgraduate Students' Officer, UCL Union [*in absentia*];
- Ms Geraldine Davies, Principal, UCL Academy [*in absentia*];
- Dr Eva Sorensen, elected member from Academic Board;
- Professor Russell Viner, elected member from Academic Board.

- 1.3 The AC Secretary noted that Clause 4 of the Committee's terms of reference should also include as item (viii) the International Strategy Board. A revised version of AC's terms of reference, constitution and 2012-13 membership would be filed with the Minutes of the meeting.

[ACTION: Mr Jason Clarke]

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 5 JULY 2012

Confirmed:

- 2.1 The Minutes of the meeting of AC held on 5 July 2012 [*AC Mins. 53-71, 5.7.12*] were confirmed by the Committee and signed by the AC Chair.

3 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES [*see Minutes 4, 5 and 6 below*]

4 WORKING GROUP ON GPA [*AC Min.57, 5.7.12*]

Noted:

- 4.1 At its meeting on 5 July 2012, AC had approved a report from its Working Group on the GPA, which had been set up further to the UCL Council White Paper 2011-21. Professor Mike Ewing, as Chair of the Working Group, gave an oral progress report.

Reported:

- 4.2 Due to difficulties over allocation of resources (both financial and staffing), the large-scale pilot involving all UCL departments had not yet been undertaken. However, it was anticipated that the pilot would take place in the coming year.

- 4.3 The GPA modelling exercise in the Faculty of Laws had resulted in a significant decrease in overall results when transferring marks from the current classification system to the GPA scheme, with no student achieving the equivalent of a first class result. The standard GPA model, which compared a result of 70% to a GPA of 3.75, would need to be reduced to 65% in Laws in order to avoid overall grade deflation.
- 4.4 The next phase of the GPA modelling exercise would use results from the Department of Mathematics.

Discussion:

- 4.5 It was noted by AC members that moving to a GPA scheme would have greater implications for quantitative subjects compared to qualitative subjects. Understanding and describing the characteristics of an 'excellent' piece of work, regardless of subject, would be key in moving towards the GPA scheme.
- 4.6 AC thanked the members of the GPA Working Group and agreed that a further report be made to the Committee in the Spring Term 2013.

RESOLVED

- 4.7 That the Working Group on the GPA submit a progress report to AC in the Spring Term 2013.

**[ACTION: Professor Mike Ewing/Mr Rob Traynor/Mr Jason Clarke
– to note for March 2013 meeting of AC]**

5 REVIEW OF ACADEMIC COMMITTEE AND ITS SUBSTRUCTURE [AC Min.68, 5.7.12]

Noted:

- 5.1 A report at AC 1-2 (12-13) from the AC officers on the outcome of the meeting of committee officers held on 12 July 2012 to review the 2010 reforms of AC and its substructure, introduced by the AC Secretary.

Reported:

- 5.2 The AC officers had concluded that, overall, the reforms that were made to AC and its substructure in 2010 had had a positive effect and the new structure was working better than the previous structure. However, the review had identified a number of areas where further thought and work was required and these were set out in the report. In the view of the AC officers, the most pressing matters which required further consideration were (i) the role, composition and operation of AC itself, and (ii) the two areas of activity (*ie* student experience and recruitment and admissions) which were not seen as being adequately covered by the current committee system.
- 5.3 UCL, in common with all other UK HEIs, is facing a myriad of demands, pressures and reporting requirements from external bodies and, in order to meet these external obligations in an effective way, it was necessary to ensure that AC and its committee substructure was operating as effectively and efficiently as possible.
- 5.4 In light of the above, the AC officers had drawn up a set of proposals which were summarised at Section 3 of the report at AC 1-2 (12-13). AC was invited to consider those proposals and, in light of the Committee's discussion, the AC officers would submit revised recommendations to AC at its December meeting, with a view to those taking effect from 1 January 2013.

Discussion:

- 5.5 The Faculty Tutor for A&H, supported by the Faculty Tutors for FBE and FLS, expressed opposition to any suggestion that the Faculty Tutors should no longer serve on AC, which was implied by the proposal at paragraph 19 of the report (that the *ex officio* membership of the Faculty Tutors on AC be reviewed), on the following grounds: this could be seen as downgrading the importance of learning and teaching at UCL; Faculty Tutors were responsible for writing Faculty Learning and Teaching Strategies; Faculty Tutors played a vital bridging role between institutional-level bodies such as AC and faculties and their constituent departments; they are also responsible for disseminating information and policies made at AC within their faculties and for ensuring the implementation of those policies *etc* within their departments; given the non-attendance at AC of some Deans of Faculty, which was noted in the AC officers' report, if the Faculty Tutors were not members then some faculties might have no representation at AC.
- 5.6 One of the Faculty Deans present supported the idea of AC acting in a more strategic way and that AC should act as a forum in which Deans of Faculty can discuss issues related to education, teaching and learning, and the student experience. While it was important for Faculty Tutors to be aware of institutionally-agreed operating procedures *etc*, this could be achieved using other mechanisms.
- 5.7 There was support for the proposal that further consideration should be given to the processes in place for reviewing the academic performance of faculties. It was suggested that the levels of authority delegated by central bodies to faculty-level committees and officers should also be reviewed .
- 5.8 The Provost noted that there was a need to achieve greater clarity in terms of where responsibility rests at different levels of UCL for taking forward the educational reform agenda set out in the Council White Paper 2011-21, as well addressing issues such as variability of practice between departments and the effective dissemination of good practice across the university in areas such as departmental operations, the student experience, admissions and widening participation. AC should be driving forward progress in these areas and its membership should be constructed to enable it to perform that role and to ensure accountability for performance within UCL.
- 5.9 In light of the growing and increasingly diverse demands being placed on UCL referred to above, there was support for the call in the paper for greater consideration to be given to any specialist or technical knowledge, expertise or experience required by those serving on particular committees.
- 5.10 The AC Chair thanked colleagues for their comments. He and the AC Secretary would reflect on the points which had been raised and bring a further set of proposals to the December meeting.

[ACTION: Professor Anthony Smith, Mr Jason Clarke]

6 THE NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY [AC Min.62, 5.7.12]
[Mr Rob Traynor, Quality Assurance Officer, Academic Support, attended for this item]

Noted:

- 6.1 A presentation¹ by the AC Chair on UCL's performance in the 2012 NSS, including discussion of the action that could be taken by departments, faculties and UCL institutionally on the issues raised by UCL's students.

¹ A copy of the presentation is filed with the Minutes of the meeting as AC 1-6 (12-13).

Reported:

6.2 In his presentation, the AC Chair noted the following in particular:

- The UCL Council White Paper 2011-21 noted that UCL's aim is to be in the top three institutions in the UK for education. However, the 2012 NSS results put UCL 73rd in the UK, with an overall satisfaction of 85% (equal to the sector average), and 20th out of 24 among Russell Group universities.
- The 2012 NSS received the highest ever participation levels at UCL – 64% of UCL undergraduate students had taken part. However, this was still 2% behind the sector average participation level of 66%.
- NSS results show that UCL is behind the sector average for its scores in (i) student assessment and feedback by 8%, (ii) academic support by 3%, and (iii) personal development by 4%.
- UCL will need to reflect on the free comments made by students on the NSS. More negative comments had been made by students compared to positive comments in the 2012 NSS.
- UCL should ensure that it keeps up with sector improvements, and exceeds the sector average in all criteria assessed by the NSS², not only for undergraduate students, but also postgraduate students.
- The KIS data which will be published on the Unistats website³ will detail contact hours, employability and NSS student satisfaction, amongst other things, and will be viewed by prospective students.
- Some Russell Group universities did not meet their projected recruitment targets for 2012-13, and were using clearing to fill some places. As a result, competition for 2013-14 recruitment will be increased, especially since the uncapped student threshold will be changed to ABB.

6.3 Mr Traynor noted that Faculty Digests of the NSS data would be made available to each faculty shortly and would enable faculties to compare performance between their departments. Data from the NSS also enabled faculties to be compared against each other.

Discussion:

6.4 Members of AC discussed how UCL could improve assessment and feedback, and noted that the current service standard which required assessed work to be returned to students within four weeks was creating workload issues for academic staff. Questions needed to be asked about whether the current system of assessment was fully supporting student learning and if not, how it could be done differently. The following examples were suggested:

- less formal assessment could take place;
- assessment could shift from summative to more formative;
- Postgraduate Teaching Assistants could be better used for undergraduate student assessment and feedback;
- increased use should be made of online assessment resources.

It was also noted that departments needed to better manage the expectations of new students on assessment and feedback at university compared to that experienced at secondary school.

² The NSS assesses (i) Teaching, (ii) Assessment and Feedback, (iii) Academic Support, (iv) Organisation and Management, (v) Learning Resources and, (vi) Personal Development, all of which provide the overall satisfaction rate.

³ See <http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>.

- 6.5 The AC Chair thanked members for their comments, which would inform his discussions with faculties and departments on what steps they could take in response to their NSS results.

[ACTION: Professor Anthony Smith]

7 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

7A Student Engagement Monitoring

Reported:

- 7A.1 The AC Chair thanked Faculty Tutors for their responses on engagement monitoring and reminded members that UKBA rules had changed and that ten points of student engagement monitoring were now required, five of which had to take place within the student's home department.

7B A-level Reform

Reported:

- 7B.1 The Russell Group had proposed that a new body be set up to provide advice to the government on A-level reform. The AC Chair had been invited to serve on the working group set up to look at the membership and remit of the advisory body. UCL colleagues who were contacted by exam boards *etc* should wait until discussions of the working group had taken place before responding to any enquiries.

7C Global Citizenship at UCL

Reported:

- 7C.1 Expressions of interest for the Global Citizenship programme at UCL, such as assisting with its development, or suggestions or offers of courses for the programme, should contact Mr Josh Blacker⁴ in the Vice-Provost (Education)'s/AC Chair's Office.

8 ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE VICE-PROVOST (RESEARCH) [AC Min.45D, 10.5.12]

Approved:

- 8.1 The Annual Report from the Vice-Provost (Research), which incorporated the 'Lead Officer' report on Research Strategy, at AC 1-3 (12-13) was approved by AC.

9 ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE COMMITTEE FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Approved:

- 9.1 The Annual Report from the CEO for session 2011-12 at AC 1-4 (12-13) was approved by AC.

Reported:

- 9.2 The AC Chair invited Faculty Tutors to submit the report for their FTCs for discussion.

[ACTION: Faculty Tutors]

⁴ See <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/downloads/global-citizenship-programme-call-for-expressions-of-interest>

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

Noted:

10.1 The AC officers had received on behalf of AC, since the last meeting of AC, Minutes of the following:

- Committee for Equal Opportunities (13.6.12);
- Education Committee (29.6.12);
- Joint Staff Student Committee (17.5.12);
- Library Committee (14.6.12);
- Quality Management and Enhancement Committee (19.6.12);
- Research Degrees Committee (11.6.12);
- Research Governance Committee (25.6.12);
- Student Scholarships and Funding Committee (28.6.12).

11 FACULTY TEACHING COMMITTEES

Noted:

11.1 A list at AC 1-5 (12-13) of the meetings of FTCs of which the Minutes had been received by the AC Secretary on behalf of AC since the Committee's last meeting.

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted:

12.1 The next meeting would be on **Thursday 13 December 2012** at **9.00am** in the **Old Refectory**.