



Academic Committee

Thursday 24th June 2021 at 10:00am

Video-conferencing meeting via MS Teams

Minutes

Present Members:

President and Provost (Chair); Dr Paul Ayris; Dr Simon Banks; Mr Ayman Benmati; Professor David Bogle; Professor Clare Brooks; Professor Stella Bruzzi; Professor Jon Butterworth; Ms Yasmeen Daoud; Mr Ashley Doolan; Professor Piet Eeckhout; Dr Julie Evans; Professor Dame Hazel Genn; Professor Deborah Gill; Dr Hugh Goodacre; Dr Christine Hoffmann; Professor Arne Hofmann; Professor Christoph Lindner; Dr Helen Matthews; Professor Hynek Pikhart; Professor David Price; Professor Geraint Rees; Professor Aeli Roberts; Professor Sue Rogers; Professor Sasha Roseneil; Mr Mike Rowson; Dr Ruth Siddall; Dr Justin Siefker; Professor David Shanks; Professor Sam Smidt; Professor Olga Thomas; Professor Nigel Titchener-Hooker

Attendees:

Mr Kevin Brice, Casework Manager, Student and Registry Services
Dr Clare Goudy, Chief of Staff, Provost's Office

Apologies:

Ms Wendy Appleby; Dr Simon Cane; Professor Mark Emberton; Professor Graham Hart; Professor David Lomas; Professor Ivan Parkin; Dr Meera Nath Sarin; Mr Jim Onyemenam; Dr Hazel Smith; Professor Alan Thompson; Dr Eleanor Tillett; Dr Kathryn Walsh

Officer:

Ms Rachel Port

Part I: Preliminary Business

30. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2021

- 30.1. Academic Committee (AC) approved the minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2021 [Minutes 19-29, 2020-21].

31. Matters arising from the Minutes

31.1. There were no matters arising.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

32. Plans for developing the new institutional strategy for UCL

32.1. The Provost gave an oral report on plans for developing the new institutional strategy for UCL. The key points made were:

- a. A number of preparatory pieces of work were being undertaken ahead of the launch of the community-wide consultation in the autumn to develop UCL's new Strategic Plan for the next five years.
- b. Views on areas that UCL might wish to focus on were being collated to inform the discussion papers which would be released in the autumn to accompany the consultation. The purpose of those was not to foreclose information but to help get discussions started to inform the development of the draft strategy.
- c. Professor Geraint Rees, Dean, Faculty of Life Sciences, had been appointed to the new interim role of Pro-Provost (Academic Planning) where he would act as adviser to the Provost through this process and provide senior academic input to translate the strategy into action.

33. Confidential: Principal Theme 3 Report (Paper 4-18)

33.1. Exempt from publication, please see confidential minutes.

34. Student Complaints Annual Report 2020 (Paper 4-19)

34.1. Mr Kevin Brice, Casework Manager, introduced the annual report on student complaints at UCL. The key points made were:

- a. The annual report was compiled on a calendar year basis as this reflected the approach taken by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).
- b. It was considered that the raw numbers in relation to the numbers of students that submitted complaints on their own were of limited use or could possibly give a misleading impression. For example, where external factors affected the nature of the student experience, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, some students would submit complaints irrespective of whether the complaint had any real merit.

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- c. UCL received 430 formal student complaints in 2020, which was more than double the total (200) in 2019. It was considered that this reflected the impact of the pandemic as well as the industrial action taken during the year.
- d. While the numbers of complaints increased substantially for all student types in 2020, the increase for postgraduate students was significantly higher than for undergraduate students.
- e. This increase in caseload had a significant impact on the Student Casework Team. However, the Team had been able to achieve economies of scale in processing such a high volume of complaints as many of those were submitted on identical grounds. This had been the case with, (i), complaints about the impact of industrial action, where the Team was able to apply the approach adopted by the OIA in the previous round of strikes in 2018, and, (ii), complaints about the impact of Covid-19, where the sector was informed by the Government's position that a switch to online delivery did not, in itself, warrant fee reductions.
- f. In 2020 a significant number of complaints (10%) were withdrawn before being considered.
- g. Of the 430 complaints received in 2020, 195 were submitted as academic complaints and 235 were submitted as non-academic complaints.
- h. In terms of outcomes, 24% of complaints were upheld or partially upheld, while 54% were not upheld or not taken forward. The high proportion of upheld and partially upheld complaints was driven primarily by, (i), complaints about the strike action, where taking the OIA's approach resulted in a number of upheld complaints, and, (ii), complaints about Covid-19, particularly in laboratory-based programmes.
- i. In 2020, UCL awarded compensation amounting to some £38k compared to some £13k in 2019.
- j. It was considered that the outcomes data was especially useful and that in future annual reports more information would be included about lessons to be learned and any emerging trends.

34.2 The following points were made in discussion:

- a. The Provost noted that in terms of the outcome of complaints by faculty, three faculties (Institute of Education, Population Health Sciences and Social and Historical Sciences) experienced a high number of upheld/partially upheld outcomes. There was interest in seeing more data in future annual reports about whether such outcomes at faculty level focused on certain issues and/or concerned particular programmes of study. It was noted, however, that the three faculties concerned had a high incidence of industrial action in 2020.
- b. In response to a query about group complaints, it was noted that such complaints were shown as '1' within the report. AC noted that whilst 1 student might submit a complaint, it could affect 20 students and suggested that outcomes data in relation to group complaints be included

in future reports. The Provost was of the view that every complaining student should be shown as '1'.

- c. The Student Mediator had received some 20 student complaints via the UCL Report + Support online tool but not all were referred for consideration under the formal procedure.
- d. In terms of the format of future reports, it was suggested that the Casework Manager might liaise with the Customer Services Excellence Team (www.customerexcellence.uk.com) to give some insight about how to develop future versions.
- e. The Vice-Provost (Education and Student Experience) who chaired complaints panels for academic complaints from taught students under the UCL Student Complaints Procedure noted that one common issue arising from handling complaints surrounded whether or not there was a programme handbook for the programme of study concerned. The OIA liked to have programme handbooks and it was problematic if UCL did not have it or could not access historical versions.
- f. It was suggested that it might be beneficial to have a standard template to be used to develop such handbooks and that they be held in a central repository for ease of access for the central Casework Team. The arrangements for annual archiving of handbooks would also need to be considered although it was noted that this could be difficult as some handbooks were created in web format only.
- g. The Provost expressed his thanks to Mr Brice for the annual report.

34.3. AC:

- a. Agreed that the Vice-Provost (Education and Student Experience) and the Casework Manager, (i) incorporate fewer statistics and greater insight into outcomes data in next year's annual report and, (ii), consider the feasibility of creating a central UCL repository for all UCL Programme Handbooks with relevant officers.

Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

35. Lead Officer Report 2019/20 – UCL Careers (Paper 4-20)

- 35.1. AC received the Lead Officer Report – UCL Careers 2019-20.

36. Lead Officer report 2019/20 and 2020/21: Student Support and Wellbeing (Paper 4-21)

- 36.1. AC received the Lead Officer Report – Student Support and Wellbeing 2019-20 and 2020-21.

37. BEAMS Annual Report to Council 2021 (Paper 4-22)

37.1. AC received the BEAMS Annual Report to Council 2021.

38. IOE Annual Report to Council 2021 (Paper 4-23)

38.1. AC received the IOE Annual Report to Council 2021.

39. SLASH Annual Report to Council 2021 (Paper 4-24)

39.1. AC received the SLASH Annual Report to Council 2021.

40. SLMS Annual Report to Council 2021 (Paper 4-25)

40.1. AC received the SLMS Annual Report to Council 2021.

41. Annual Report on New Programmes of Study Approved in 2020-21 (Paper 4-26)

41.1. AC received the Annual Report on New Programmes of Study Approved in 2020-21.

42. Reports of sub-committees, working groups etc of AC

42.1. AC received the following sets of minutes:

- a. The minutes of Education Committee, 23 February 2021; 27 April 2021;
- b. The minutes of Innovation and Enterprise Committee, 4 February 2021;
- c. The minutes of Library Committee, 17 February 2021;
- d. The minutes of Research Degrees Committee, 10 March 2021;
- d. The minutes of Research Governance Committee, 26 November 2020;
- e. The minutes of Student Experience Committee, 26 January 2021; 22 March 2021;
- f. The minutes of Student, Recruitment, Admissions and Funding Committee, 9 March 2021.

43. Dates of next meetings

43.1. The next meetings of Academic Committee would be held as follows:

Thursday 18 November 2021 at 10.00am

Thursday 3 March 2022 at 10.00am

Thursday 23 June 2022 at 10.00am.

Ms Rachel Port
Secretary to Academic Committee
September 2021