Academic Committee
Extraordinary Meeting
Friday 29 May 2020 at 1:30pm

Minutes

Present Members:
President and Provost (Chair); Ms Wendy Appleby; Dr Paul Ayris; Dr Simon Banks; Professor David Bogle; Dame Nicola Brewer; Professor Stella Bruzzi; Dr Simon Cane; Mr Ashley Doolan; Professor Piet Eeckhout; Professor Mark Emberton; Dr Julie Evans; Dr Hugh Goodacre; Dr Christine Hoffmann; Dr Arne Hofmann; Dr Sandra Leaton-Gray; Professor Christoph Lindner; Ms Blathnaid Mahony;; Dr Helen Matthews; Mr Jim Onyemenam; Professor Norbert Pachler; Professor Ivan Parkin; Professor Hynek Pikhart; Professor David Price; Professor Geraint Rees; Professor Sue Rogers; Professor Sasha Roseneil; Mr Mike Rowson; Professor David Shanks; Dr Ruth Siddall; Ms Ashley Slanina-Davies; Dr Sam Smidt; Professor Anthony Smith; Dr Hazel Smith; Ms Olga Thomas; Professor Alan Thompson; Professor Nigel Titchener-Hooker; Professor Andrea Townsend-Nicholson; Professor Li Wei; Professor Andrew Wills; Dr Stan Zochowski

Attendees:
Professor Nora Colton, Pro-Vice-Provost (Postgraduate Education)
Dr Clare Goudy, Provost's Office
Mr Derfel Owen, Director of Education Services and Transformation
Ms Anne Marie O'Mullane, Academic Services

Apologies:
Dr Celia Caulcott; Professor Graham Hart; Professor David Lomas; Ms Aatikah Malik

Officer:
Ms Rachel Port

Part I: Matter for Discussion

38. The Temporary Operating Model for Academic Year 2020-21 (Paper 4-26)

38.1. At the start of the meeting, the Chair thanked members for attending the meeting at short notice. It had been arranged in light of the urgent need to approve the proposed Temporary Operating Model (TOM) at UCL for next session. Announcements had already been made by a number of other institutions including Cambridge, Oxford, Reading and Manchester universities about their teaching arrangements for next session. Both the Office for Students (OfS) and the Department for Education expected institutions to be clear to prospective students about their plans for teaching ahead of the UCAS deadline of 18 June 2020 for offer holders to confirm their decision. It was noted that the Silver Sapphire Groups, convened under UCL's Gold/Silver/Bronze crisis management structure, had undertaken a huge amount of work at speed to plan UCL's activities in 2020-21 in light of the Covid-19 outbreak.

38.2. Professor Geraint Rees, Dean of the Faculty of Life Sciences and Silver Sapphire Lead, introduced the paper setting out high-level proposals for teaching arrangements for UCL students in academic year 2020-21. The key points made were:

    a. The first term next session would start in only 122 days and while the government had eased some aspects of the Covid-19 lockdown due to the decrease in the incidence of cases, the ongoing restrictions on social distancing and international travel would prevent the normal operation of teaching and learning at UCL next session.

    b. Therefore, UCL's teaching operations would need to be modified to allow for adherence to current social distancing rules of 2 metres and this would reduce the capacity of space on campus by 85%. Consequently, the opportunities for face-to-face activities on campus would be significantly limited in Term 1 and were envisaged to extend beyond that.

    c. In light of this, the core operating principles in the proposed TOM were that, (i) for teaching and learning activities with more than 15 students, staff should prepare to deliver it remotely, but that for groups of less than 15 students, such as tutorials or laboratory sessions for example, it be delivered face-to-face on campus wherever possible and safe; and (ii) it was intended that the campus would be open next session including UCL's Student Centre and UCL Library.

    d. It was anticipated that students would come to London in person where possible, but where this was not possible due to travel restrictions, for example, their teaching would need to be delivered online.

    e. It was considered that the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students was a top priority in the development of the model.

f. The proposed model was meant to be temporary but it was unknown how long it would be needed. Normal teaching and learning activity would be restored once it was safe to do so.

g. The four enhanced capabilities required to support the TOM had been identified as: (i) increasing the capacity of our Virtual Learning Environment to support up to 12k simultaneous connections; (ii) all critical processes must be adapted to work digitally and a significant number of IT enhancements were required to do this; (iii) deliver the estates and timetabling changes necessary for the safe operation of any teaching and learning spaces that would be used for face-to-face teaching, and arrange for the safe operation of student accommodation; and (iv) an enhanced level of student and staff welfare support.

h. UCL expected to be undertaking research and innovation at the start of next session and different operating models would also be required. It was noted that the TOM enforced by social distancing would slow the pace of research and potentially affect career progression. The Research and Innovation workstream was working on plans for those areas.

i. Subject to AC approved of the proposed model, it would allow UCL to move forward with detailed planning for its operations next session.

j. The Vice-Provost (Education and Student Affairs) added that the Silver Sapphire Groups had undertaken an enormous amount of work and the amount of preparations UCL needed to make ahead of the start of next session was huge. The proposed model would place UCL in line with some of its Russell Group peers who had already made similar announcements to inform both offer holder and returning students about their respective teaching and learning operations next session.

38.3. The following points were made in discussion:

a. It was reported that there was anecdotal evidence of concerns about: (i) staff redundancies associated with decisions to suspend modules arising from the Emergency Resilience Framework; (ii) the lack of broad consultation about the proposed model with Academic Board and UCL branches of the Trades Unions, and; (iii) instances where staff were reluctant to travel to campus to undertake face-to-face teaching.

b. In relation to staff redundancies, the Provost confirmed that UCL currently had no plans for redundancies. UCL was trying to control its non-pay costs but the financial situation was very difficult in light of the Covid-19 outbreak. If the financial situation became far worse than the worst case scenario currently being modelled by UCL Finance and Business Affairs, then redundancy would be considered as an absolute last resort.

c. In terms of consultation there was no way for big groupings such as Academic Board (AB) with a membership of some 1200 to meet virtually in an interactive way with the technology currently available. The Governance Committee of Academic Board (GCAB) had also agreed that this was impossible in the current situation. Therefore, UCL had moved to

an online all staff consultation that was announced in the UCL Staff News on 26 May 2020. The Provost acknowledged that this situation was challenging but UCL was working at a rapid pace and the OfS had instructed institutions to make clear their plans by 18 June 2020 which reduced the time available to consult with the UCL community. The Provost would alert GCAB of the concern raised about AB not being able to meet virtually in a meaningful way.

d. It was considered that remote delivery of teaching was required precisely for instances where staff were reluctant or unable to travel to campus to undertake face-to-face activity. However, it was anticipated that there would be very few face-to-face activities on campus in light of the current social distancing rules and the impact of social distancing decreasing capacity by 85%.

e. In terms of the duration of the TOM, this was unknown but it would continue to be needed if the UK suffered recurrent outbreaks or a second wave of the virus in the future, such as had happened in Seoul that returned to lockdown yesterday.

f. It was proposed that the section of the TOM stating an enhanced level of student and staff welfare support be reworded as it did not look possible to deliver on this with current resources.

g. It was commented that the Institute of Education (IOE) had experimented with large group pedagogy whereby online and face-to-face teaching were run concurrently but students did not like it and it did not work well. Consequently, tutors ended up teaching a large amount of material via email. In response, AC noted that social distancing meant that UCL could not operate normally as it would not be safe and therefore it had to move to online provision for however long the rules were in place.

h. It was noted that appropriate colleagues from the IOE were assisting Teams in the Silver Sapphire structure with learning technologies support.

i. Concern was raised about the impact of the TOM on staff workload. It was considered that the double load implied by a model that encompassed both online and face-to-face teaching for the same activities would stretch staff resources. It was acknowledged that the impact on staff workload was a serious consideration in preparing to deliver teaching remotely next session.

j. Professor Rees confirmed that there was going to be some irreducible content that might not be possible to deliver online that required face-to-face teaching, but this would have to be delivered safely.

k. It was also suggested that administration be streamlined to free up more time for teaching and development by staff to ensure their workload was manageable. AC agreed that it was important to support staff and Professor Rees as Silver Sapphire Lead welcomed suggestions.

l. The emergency resilience framework was working to a tight schedule and it was suggested that its schedule might be extended now that the TOM had been developed, as it was likely that most staff had been preparing

for all teaching to be delivered remotely next session with no face-to-face teaching at all.

m. Timetabling would be complex and difficult next session and the Bronze Sapphire Group on Infrastructure was looking at this area in detail.

n. It was noted that the process for implementing the necessary programme and module changes had been revised to be as light touch and simple for staff as possible.

o. It was queried whether students would be able to undertake the next academic year remotely even if the government guidance changed which removed the need for social distancing.

p. It was noted that different time zones meant that remote learning might not work for smaller group teaching, while lectures could be pre-recorded and students could view them at whatever time they wished.

q. It was commented that both the ethos of coming to UCL such as for engagement with academics, as well as the mechanics, should be emphasised to prevent an overemphasis on the calibre of online materials. Professor Rees agreed that the ethos was needed but that a lot of detailed questions from students were about the mechanics of the delivery of teaching and learning.

r. It was noted that the TOM contained little information about learning spaces and libraries whereas the proposed Statement to Students below contained much more. It was intended that, subject to AC approval, both the TOM and the statement would be shared with staff together and be made available online.

s. It was noted that a Frequently Asked Questions document was being prepared by UCL Communications & Marketing (CAM) as PGT students tended to ask very detailed questions about teaching and learning arrangements for next session. This document would be shared in due course subject to the TOM being approved.

t. It was noted that PGT programmes often rested on a research project undertaken in Term 3 and that would need to be taken into consideration.

u. The Provost confirmed that the TOM was the beginning of UCL's planning for activities next term.

38.4. **AC agreed:**
a. **That the proposed Teaching Operating Model at UCL for academic year 2020-21 be approved.**

39. Statement for Students (Paper 4-27)

39.1. AC received the proposed Statement for Students for information. The following points were made in discussion:

a. The Provost had attended a Heads of Department meeting in the Faculty of Art and Humanities earlier in the day and noted that colleagues were keen to see the planning on teaching and learning activities next session.

(The Provost left the meeting at this point and the Vice-Chair took over as Chair.)

b. It was noted that communicating with students about arrangements for 2020-21 would be the next step now that the TOM had been approved. Communications had been developed with CAM and were ready to be sent to offer holders and returning students.

c. It was considered that important to have targeted communications for PGT students, who would only be at UCL for a one year programme, and especially for PGR students. The Bronze Aquamarine Group on Research Students was considering guidance for PGR students that would build on UCL's teaching and research plans. It was intended that CAM would liaise with the UCL Doctorial School about a PGR version of the statement.

d. It was requested that any central communications sent out to UCL students be copied to Faculty Tutors as they were often the first port of call locally for student enquiries.

39.3. **AC endorsed the proposed Statement to Students.**

Ms Rachel Port
Secretary to Academic Committee
June 2020