



Estates Committee

17 October 2022

MINUTES

Present: Ms Sarah Whitney (Chair), Mr Roger Blundell, Professor Jonathan Butterworth, Mr Phil Clark, Mr Turlogh O'Brien, Professor Michael Pitt, Dr Michael Spence (Provost).

In attendance: Mr Adrien Cooper [for minute 11], Mr Ian Dancy, Ms Charu Gorasia, Mr Nick McGhee (Secretary), Mr Andy Smith, Ms Tracy Smith [for minute 12].

Observer: Mr Deniz Akinci, Union Affairs Officer, Students Union UCL.

Part I: Preliminary Business

9 MATTERS ARISING

- 9.1 Professor Stephanie Bird had agreed to fill the vacancy for an internal members appointed by Council [Estates Committee Minute 1, 2022-23].
- 9.2 Estates Committee welcomed Deniz Akinci, SU Union Affairs Officer, as an observer at the meeting.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

10 ESTATES STRATEGY (Paper 2-01)

- 10.1 Estates Committee reviewed the paper, noting the changes made following the discussion at the Council Away Day. These included an increased focus on the principles behind the strategy and on the medium-term vision.
- 10.2 During the course of discussion it was noted that:
 - approval for individual projects within the overall £800m 5-year envelope (£160m per annum) would be sought by way of the established governance framework, with those projects to be identified using the principles-based approach set out in the Strategy. Projects would be prioritised using the criteria developed through the Targeted Academic Investment work and would be informed by considerations of safety compliance as well as levels of demand;
 - spend and savings would be tracked through the Financial Sustainability programme. Future progress updates would include details of savings;

- there was support for an additional principle relating to the importance of a safe and healthy work environment;
- further consideration would need to be given to the presentation of the issue of student spaces, and in particular how this was to be differentiated from the Student Life Strategy and the question of space for the students' union, with the Estates Strategy being updated accordingly;
- It was suggested that a map of the decision-making process could prove useful, and that this could include timelines and key approval points, and a summary of what had been approved, allocated and not yet committed. Estates Committee agreed that it should also review approved projects where contractual commitments had not yet been entered into. Further details of the governance around decision-making and the use of dashboard information would be brought to a future meeting.

Action – Executive Director of Operations

11 UNIAC COMPLIANCE (Paper 2-02)

- 11.1 Estates Committee received a presentation from the incoming Director of Campus Infrastructure and Operations, addressing the key themes of the UNIAC report, the workplan of action required to address the issues identified, and the plans for tracking progress by way of a dashboard.
- 11.2 Next steps in the process would include: clarification on the responsibilities of particular roles; development of policies and procedures; and work to address the culture in respect of health and safety across the institution.
- 11.3 During the course of the discussion the following points were made:
- The Committee was concerned with some aspects of the update, despite the fact that progress was being made. The Provost assured the Committee that compliance matters and Health and Safety were an absolute priority for the institution, and the Estates Strategy would be amended accordingly to highlight this priority.
 - Members understood that the data required to populate the dashboard may not be available for some time. The Committee queried whether additional resources were required in this area. It was noted that the Estates team was devoting multiple half-day training sessions to focus on particular issues arising from the report. The Infrastructure Safety Sub-committee met regularly to consider these issues.
 - The complexities of the way in which UCL's management structures interacted with the estate – for example in respect of departmental responsibility shared within buildings or spread across multiple sites – meant that the demarcation of responsibilities in different spaces was often unclear. Further work was required to clarify roles and to work with HR on embedding these into job descriptions.
 - The Committee members were not experts on issues of health and safety compliance and the future reports should be framed with that in mind. Members also requested that these include clarification on the risks to which the institution was exposed.

- Given the critical importance of Health and Safety matters, there was a discussion about whether members of Council had a good enough line of sight on these issues. The Chair would raise the matter at the forthcoming Council meeting.

Action – the Chair

12 UCL ACCOMMODATION – NOMINATIONS AGREEMENT (Paper 2-03)

12.1 In view of the relative unlikelihood of a decline in demand for student accommodation UCL was seeking to secure cost-efficiencies by way of establishing longer-term nominations agreements. Discussions were ongoing with UrbanNest in respect of One Trafalgar Way.

12.2 During the discussion the following points were raised:

- The aim was to secure agreements that were cost neutral to UCL. ‘Cost neutral’ referred to a balance between the price from the supplier and the charge to students, taking account of additional costs of welfare delivery and any shortfall in uptake of rooms. The risk of empty beds in the context of another pandemic was discussed. It was agreed that the availability of insurance in on this question should be explored.

Action – Director of Campus Experience and Commercial Services

- The cost savings available through longer-term negotiation were at around 7%, or 11% if there were no break clause for a ten-year period. These agreements were difficult to benchmark against the sector due to the unavailability of data and the variables in local conditions. Legal advice was obtained on nominations agreements but advice was not taken in respect of the commercial position. The possibility of reverse-engineering the provider’s financial model was noted.
- In respect of shared halls, there was reason to believe that there were advantages to students in mixing with students from other institutions, although this was not necessarily what students wanted.
- In considering the scope for negotiation it would be good to understand the financial returns for the operator. It was noted that One Trafalgar Way was intended to be an off balance-sheet transaction.
- In respect of branding, there was flexibility to build this in to a particular agreement, particularly the longer-term agreements, as was the case with the terms under discussion for Trafalgar Way.
- John Dodgson House was currently being used to house students from UCL East. Once they had relocated to Stratford it would be necessary to complete a programme of fire cladding before the start of the next academic year. It was not therefore available as an option to increase the number of spaces available.
- Sites under consideration for disposal were at Victoria and Camden. These options would not be taken until additional spaces had been secured at Canary Wharf and UCL East. This would in turn facilitate the necessary refurbishment work at Bloomsbury. The Executive Director of Operations would pick this up with the Union Affairs Officer outside the meeting.

Action – Executive Director of Operations

- 12.3 Estates Committee was satisfied with the principles set out in the paper, but the matter would need to come back to a future meeting so that the Committee, as well as Finance Committee, had a clearer understanding of the financial implications. Each individual agreement would also need to come back for approval.

Part III: Other Business for information or approval

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 13.1 To be confirmed.

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