



Education Committee Extraordinary Meeting

5 February 2021

Confirmed Minutes

Present:

Professor Anthony Smith (Chair)

Ms Wendy Appleby; Dr Simon Banks; Mr Ayman Benmati; Ms Yasmeen Daoud; Mr Ashley Doolan; Dr Julie Evans; Professor Deborah Gill; Professor Arne Hofmann; Professor Jane Holder; Ms Gunay Karimova; Mr Zak Liddell; Ms Viktoria Makai; Ms Blathnaid Mahony; Dr Helen Matthews; Mr Jim Onyemenam; Mr Derfel Owen; Professor Norbert Pachler; Professor Aeli Roberts; Mr Mike Rowson; Dr Bill Sillar; Professor Sam Smidt; Dr Hazel Smith; Professor Olga Thomas and Ms Lizzie Vinton.

In attendance: Ms Joanne Moles, Ms Katie Price, Mr Steve Rowett (vice Dr Fiona Strawbridge) and Mr Rob Traynor (Secretary).

Apologies for absence were received from: Professor Clare Brooks, Professor Nora Colton, Mr Ian David, Ms Megan Gerrie, Professor Alistair Greig, Dr Jo Fraser-Pearce, Ms June Hedges and Dr Fiona Strawbridge.

Part I: Preliminary Business

1. Welcome, Apologies and Announcements

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed the EdCom members to the extraordinary meeting, convened to discuss the “No Detriment” proposals recommended by the Examinations and Assessment Contingency Panel (EACP).

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting

- 2.1. Approved – the minutes EdCom Extraordinary Meeting 8 January 2021 (EdCom Minutes 1-4, 2020-21) at Paper 1 (2020-21).

3. Examinations Operating Model Adjustment

- 3.1. Paper 2 was postponed from the agenda. The item was subsequently withdrawn as a technical solution was identified that removed the need for the adjustment.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

4. Examinations and Assessments Contingency Panel “No Detriment” Proposals

The EACP Report and Proposals

- 4.1. Received - Paper 3: COVID Mitigation for 2020-21 Assessments, introduced by the Director of Education Services and Transformation and the Director of Academic Services (AS).
- 4.2. At the last meeting, EdCom had agreed that it would not be possible to use last year's mitigation, where only the best 50% of a student's 2019-20 assessments were included in the classification. Analysis had shown that in 2019-20, individual module marks and final weighted means were comparable to previous cohorts, and the changes to classification had, in fact, been unnecessary. EdCom had instead recommended an evidence-based approach for 2020-21 assessments, where students' results would be compared to previous cohorts and any necessary steps then taken to ensure that students were not disadvantaged. However, the Students' Union (SU) was concerned that this proposal would not alleviate student concerns in advance of the assessments, and EACP had therefore been exploring alternative options.
- 4.3. The paper outlined the proposals for the “No Detriment” package for 2020-21. This included an academic impact assessment requested by Academic Board, details of the consultation process and a summary of all the different options considered by EACP.
- 4.4. The Chair informed EdCom that the revised proposals intended to strike the right balance between supporting students, who were concerned with the worsening effects of the pandemic and the lockdown, whilst maintaining UCL's academic standards and protecting the value of its qualifications in the longer term.
- 4.5. EACP had met five times and included members from the SU, faculties, AS and the Office of the Vice-Provost (Education and Student Affairs – OVPESA). Faculty Tutors and Exam Board Chairs were consulted on some of the key proposals and a small group of experienced Exam Board Chairs was convened to look at possible statistical solutions.
- 4.6. A survey was sent out to over 700 Exam Board Chairs to gather feedback on three key proposals:
 - a) Allowing students to 'postpone' the assessments in up to 30 credits of modules;
 - b) Review and scaling at module level to provide a safeguard for students this year;
 - c) Regularising classification at programme level as a way to reassure students.

- 4.7. Over 140 responses were received. None of the proposals received majority agreement, though a large number partially agreed, therefore implying mild support by a majority. However, a significant minority (36%, 20% and 25% respectively) disagreed with the proposals. However, responses generally showed a broad understanding of the need for some action to support and provide reassurance to students.
- 4.8. Following the Exam Board Chairs' feedback, EACP recommended a simplified approach, focussing on extending existing policies and procedures, whilst staying in line with the guiding principles already agreed and noted by EdCom. This included two key recommendations:
1. Additional self-certified extenuating circumstances (EC) and encouraging Faculties and Departments offer deferral of assessment to the Late Summer Assessment under the existing EC procedure.
 2. Removing the 'retrospective' action on assessment outcomes at module and programme level and simply extending the borderline range by 1.00% at programme level.

Enhanced EC Procedure

- 4.9. Although an Enhanced EC Procedure had already been implemented for 2020-21, EdCom noted that some students had used up their allocations of self-certifications due to the new wave of the pandemic and the lockdown. EACP recommended extending the number of self-certification periods per student from two to five occasions, and a sixth for programmes with a longer academic year. EACP also recommended permitting self-certification for spreading assessments between examination periods, in a move deliberately designed to support critical workers, student parents, and students with caring responsibilities.
- 4.10. The academic impact of the extended EC procedure would be dependent on the number of deferrals and extensions requested. It was noted that the number of centrally-timetabled examinations this year was less than half that in a normal year, as many exams had been replaced with coursework.
- 4.11. EdCom agreed that, on balance, the recommendation struck the right tone in supporting and reassuring students. The widened coverage of ECs to cover caring responsibilities and critical workers was also welcomed. There remained some concerns about increased staff workloads which would need to be discussed further.
- 4.12. **Agreed** – to extend the EC procedure as outlined in the EACP recommendation.

Widening the Classification Borderline

- 4.13. EdCom discussed the EACP proposal to widen the classification borderline by 1.00% as a means to reassure students. EdCom considered whether the borderline criteria

might be extended further, for example by moving from '50% of (final year) credits at 70.00% or above' to '50% of (final year) credits at 69.00% or above'. However it was noted that marks of 69% were always a very deliberate decision by markers, and that the 70.00% requirement would ensure that Firsts/ Distinctions were only awarded to students who were clearly performing at the higher level.

- 4.14. EACP noted that alternative arrangements would be required for programmes with non-standard classifications (such as the MBBS, BA English, Slade, 4 year LLB programmes and some LLM students) and for IOE PGT programmes using letter grades. The proposal was unlikely to affect staff work-loads as the calculations would be automated.
- 4.15. **Agreed** – to widen the classification borderline by 1.00% and to retain the criteria for 50% of credits to be at or above the boundary, as outlined in Paper 3.

Other Suggestions for Mitigation

- 4.16. It was queried whether mitigation for dissertations could be provided this year as students had reduced opportunities to study and conduct research in lockdown. For example, this might include allowing dissertation marks to be condonable for this year.
- 4.17. **Agreed** – that EACP consider possible mitigation for and support to students for their dissertations and report back to EdCom as necessary.
Action – EACP Chair and Secretary
- 4.18. Student concerns were also raised regarding formative assessments for some programmes in the Institute of Education (IOE). It was suggested that the IOE student representatives discuss these concerns further with the EdCom IOE staff members.

Approval of the EACP Proposals

- 4.19. **Approved** - Paper 3 COVID Mitigation for 2020-21 Assessments.
- 4.20. EdCom was informed that communications on the “No Detriment” package would be sent to students and staff early in the following week.

Part III: Matters for Information or Approval

5. Examinations and Assessments Contingency Panel Terms of Reference

- 5.1. Received: the EACP terms of reference at Paper 4 (2020-21).

6. EACP Statistical Advisory Group Terms of Reference

6.1. Received: the EACP Statistical Advisory Group terms of reference at Paper 5 (2020-21).

7. Minutes of the EACP

7.1. **Approved** - the minutes of the EACP held on 13 January 2021 at Paper 6 (20-21).

7.2. **Approved** - the minutes of the EACP held on 18 January 2021 at Paper 7 (20-21).

7.3. **Approved** - the minutes of the EACP held on 22 January 2021 at Paper 8 (20-21).

7.4. **Approved** - the minutes of the EACP held on 25 January 2021 at Paper 9 (20-21).

Rob Traynor
Secretary to EdCom

Policy Adviser (Education Governance)
Academic Services [telephone 0203 108 8213, UCL extension 582123, email:
r.traynor@ucl.ac.uk]

15 February 2021