Education Committee

6 October 2020

Confirmed Minutes

Present:
Professor Anthony Smith (Chair)
Dr Simon Banks; Professor Nora Colton; Ms Yasmeen Daoud; Mr Ian Davis; Mr Ashley Doolan; Dr Julie Evans; Dr Jo Fraser-Pearce; Ms Megan Gerrie; Professor Deborah Gill; Professor Alistair Greig; Ms June Hedges; Professor Arne Hofmann; Mr Zak Liddell; 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; Dr Fiona Strawbridge; Professor Olga Thomas and Ms Lizzie Vinton.

In attendance: Ms Joanne Moles and Professor Simon Walker for Item 7; Mr Nick McGhee and Mr Kevin Brice for Item 7; Mr Gary Smith for Item 8 and 9; Ms Alison Edridge for Item 9; Ms Leigh Kilpert for Item 13 and Mr Rob Traynor (Secretary).

Apologies for absence were received from: Ms Wendy Appleby; Mr Ayman Benmati; Professor Clare Brooks and Professor Jane Holder.

Part I: Preliminary Business

1. Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership 2020-21

1.1. Approved – the terms of reference, constitution and membership for Education Committee (EdCom) 2020-21 at EdCom 1-01 (20-21), subject to minor amendments to two members' titles and roles.

1.2. EdCom welcomed the following new members:

- Ms Ayman Benmati – ex officio as the Students' Union (SU) Education Officer;
- Ms Yasmeen Daoud – ex officio as the SU Welfare and International Officer;
- Ms Lizzie Vinton - ex officio Academic Regulations Manager;
- Professor Clare Brooks – co-opted as the Pro-Director Education, Institute of Education in lieu of the vacant Faculty Tutor role;
- Dr Bill Sillar (Institute of Archaeology) – elected as non-professorial member of Academic Board;
- Professor Jane Holder (Laws) - elected as professorial member of Academic Board;

- Professor Alistair Greig (Mechanical Engineering) - elected as professorial member of Academic Board;
- Rob Traynor, new EdCom Secretary.

Mr Jim Onyemenam continued as ex officio SU Postgraduate Students' Officer.

1.3. Approved – the Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership for the Academic Partnerships Review Group (APRG) 2020-21 at EDCOM 1-02 (20-21).

1.4. Approved – the Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership for the Academic Regulations and Quality Assurance Sub-Committee (ARQASC) 2020-21 at EDCOM 1-03 (20-21).

1.5. Approved – the Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership for the Programme and Module Approval Panels (PMAP) 2020-21 at EDCOM 1-04 (20-21).

1.6. Approved – the Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership for the Quality Review Sub-Committee (QRSC) 2020-21 at EDCOM 1-05 (20-21).

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

2.1. Approved – the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 30 July 2020 [EdCom Minutes 79-93, 2019-20], at EDCOM 1-06 (20-21).

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes

3A Assessment Load Model

[Minute 82, EdCom 30.07.2020]

3A.1 EdCom had discussed guidance for a UCL Assessment Load Model designed to ensure a more consistent approach to student workload for summative assessment. EdCom had approved the document subject to it being clear that it was not mandatory and was for guidance only. Professor Simon Walker, Academic Lead UCL Arena confirmed that the guidance was amended, though it was expected that rationales were provided in the programme approval and amendment process for any programmes or modules deviating from the guidance.

4. Chair's Action taken since the Last Meeting

4A Exam Board Mitigation for External Examiners' Non-Attendance (Mechanical Engineering and Laws)

4A.1 Received – the paper at EDCOM 1-07 (20-21) which outlined Chair's Action taken to approve the mitigation taken by two boards of examiners (BoE), Mechanical Engineering and Laws, for non-attendance by external examiners, following UCL

regulations (Academic Manual Chapter 4). The Chair was satisfied that the action taken to replace the external examiners with highly experienced UCL internal examiners by both departments was entirely appropriate and in line with the UCL procedure for such eventualities.

5. Deadlines for Changes to the Academic Manual 2021-22

5.1. Received – the paper at EDCOM 1-08 (20-21) presented by the Academic Regulations Manager, Academic Services, who outlined the key deadlines for EdCom approval of any proposed changes to the regulations and the Academic Manual for 2021-22.

5.2. EdCom noted that the paper also included the deadlines for ARQASC to consider the more substantive proposals in time for EdCom's later approval. Members should view the June 2021 meeting date as the final deadline for approval of any changes and that regulations should only be submitted to this meeting once they were in their final form. It was further advised that more substantial items should be submitted for the April 2021 meeting, in order to allow enough time for consideration.

5.3. Members were advised not to regard the reserved meeting in July 2021 as an additional opportunity for approval of changes, as it would only be held in the event of an emergency. It would also fall after the publication deadlines and hence be too late for changes to the regulations.

5.4. Academic Services had also published a staff guide to developing policies and regulations for the Academic Manual, including deadlines, approval requirements and templates. This was available on the Academic Manual About page.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

6. Digital Assessment Project

6.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 1-09 (20-21) presented by the Examinations Manager, Academic Services and the Academic Lead, UCL Arena.

6.2. The Digital Assessment Project is a major five year initiative intended to enhance and improve the design and delivery of assessment at UCL. The project is a collaborative venture involving Education Services and Transformation, UCL Arena, Academic Services, Information Services Division (ISD) and Digital Education with the UCL Schools and Students' Union (SU). The project outcomes will enable departments to use an alternative platform to Moodle offering an end to end platform in which assessment can be delivered, offering integration with the student records system (student registrations and grade input). The tender for the new platform is nearing conclusion and a supplier will be announced shortly.

6.3. The project will be split into separate phases, Phase 1 (2020/21) Proof of Concept, Pilot of full functionality and delivery of examinations for students. This will be of great benefit to the student experience by providing a more robust system for on-line assessments, with potential to enhance further as staff and students become more familiar with the platform. It is intended that the project will also help to stream-line the system for setting up and managing assessments and examinations and producing outputs, which help staff work-loads. The ability to integrate marks from the new platform directly with the student records system was seen as a major benefit for the project and should help address any concerns with workloads.

6.4. The first phase of the project is to deliver centrally managed exams in 2021, offering a new platform for all students being examined. Later phases of the project will roll out more functionality to departments and to further explore other platforms to support more innovative forms of digital assessment such as portfolios, blogs and peer grade assessment.

6.5. Governance of the project will be conducted through a Project Board to oversee the project team and provide overall direction and management. The Digital Assessment Delivery Working Group, consisting of key project staff, faculty academic leads and the SU, will ensure representation and input from faculties in order help to shape the project's delivery. Both the Project Board and Working Group will report to EdCom.

6.6. During the discussion it was noted that communication with academic and professional service staff would be essential in order to ensure buy-in for the project and engagement in its development. A roll-out of communications on the project to the wider UCL community was planned on completion of the tender stage for choosing the new assessment platform, expected this month. Only a few academic staff were aware of the project so far and concerns were expressed of potential discontent if the project was seen to be pushed through without their engagement. Introducing a new assessment platform is a major change requiring careful management across faculties and departments and they needed to be informed soon in order to plan. However, there would be no changes to the process for producing exam papers, marking and grade input this year.

6.7. It was further suggested that careful communication would be particularly important for any suggestions to change assessments arising from the greater functionality of the new assessment platform. It was important to acknowledge the primacy of academic judgement and emphasize collaboration with key staff when considering changes to future assessment and the introduction of new forms. It should not be seen as being imposed from above and it was advised that the project slides were amended to emphasize that there would be full consultation and collaboration on any new approaches to assessment.

6.8. Agreed – to amend the communications and presentation information included in the slides at EDCOM 1-09 (20-21), to ensure that it is clear that the process for

introducing any changes to assessments is collaborative with academic staff and fully acknowledges their academic judgement.

Action: Ms Joanne Moles and Professor Simon Walker

6.9. Agreed – that the Digital Assessment Project would be a standing item on the EdCom agenda, with regular reports on its progress.

Action: EdCom members to note

7. Student Casework Annual Report

7.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 1-10 (20-21) presented by the Academic Services' Deputy Director (Casework and Governance) and the Casework Manager.

7.2. The report outlined figures from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) relating to the calendar year 2019. It was not possible to report this earlier to EdCom as the OIA data were released later than usual. 200 formal student complaints were received, an 11% increase overall on 2018 and the highest annual figure UCL had so far experienced. Of the 200 formal complaint submissions received, 37 students requested an appeal on the decision reached regarding the outcome to their case and 27 of those requested a Completion of Procedures (CoP) Letter. There was a significant increase in compensation payments to students made amounting to £13,670 (£1,150 in 2018), which was mainly attributed to the OIA decisions on the industrial action arising from the pension dispute.

7.3. The Students Complaints Procedure had been revised and improved for the start of the 2019-20 session and this had led to a reduction in the number of complaints regarding procedures. The Casework Team had also been reorganised and refreshed with a new Casework Manager in place from the second term. Although there had been a substantial rise in overall case numbers for 2020, over 400 for 2020, relating to further industrial action and to COVID 19, the team was able to cope with the increased work-load through effective organisation. The 2020 figures would be reported in the next annual report. The mitigation taken for dealing with COVID 19 and the industrial action would also be reported as cases were still going through the OIA and institutions were waiting for a steer on whether the approaches taken, including the UCL Learning Opportunities Fund, were acceptable.

7.4. During the discussion it was noted that although the break-down of the figures by faculty showed some with large numbers of initial complaints, it was important to take into account the size of the faculties and to consider the actual outcomes of the complaints. It was suggested that figures showing the numbers of students in each faculty should be added to the report in future, to provide context to the numbers involved. It was further noted that the Casework Team would be engaging with faculties to discuss trends and any specific issues relating to individual faculties.

7.5. Agreed – that the Casework Team add overall student figures for each faculty and UCL in future to provide greater context to the report.

Action – Mr Nick McGhee and Mr Kevin Brice

8. Entry Tariff Anomalies

8.1. The Deputy Director (Head of Student Data) of Academic Services and the Faculty Tutor (Engineering) informed EdCom of a problem where the Office for Students' (OfS) Unistats website for prospective students and the UK league tables were presenting a misleading picture of entry tariffs. This had arisen from the way that "non-tariff" qualifications such as the new International A levels were treated by UCAS and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), which had a significant impact on overall programme and department rankings in the league tables.

8.2. UCL was disproportionately affected by this due to the qualification profile of its undergraduate (UG) intake. There was an associated reputational risk to recruitment, notably of Home students, for whom the affected tables are likely to be of most relevance. In the most recent set of UK league tables (Times, Complete University Guide etc.) and in the Unistats data, there was a drop in the overall mean tariff scores for UCL UG degree entrants and in science and engineering subjects.

8.3. The individual entry qualification data provided to HESA was checked and was correct and there had been no fall in the number and grades of UG entrants' qualifications on entry. The 2018 entrant data (on which the latest league tables were based) included large numbers of entrants with International A levels among their entry qualifications, usually in conjunction with other qualifications. The international A levels were introduced in the last two years by Cambridge International A/AS Level, Pearson Edexcel International A/AS Level and the Oxford and Cambridge International AQA A/AS Level. UCAS does not assign these qualifications any tariff value as it regards them as non-UK qualifications and as HESA calculates the entry tariff value for each qualification based on UCAS guidance, these values are then fed into the league tables and Unistats data.

8.4. This meant, as an example, that an entrant with three A-star grade A levels would have a tariff 168 if these were all UK A levels, but only 56 if one of these was a UK A level and the other two international ones. Any calculation of mean values is therefore skewed and will affect those subjects and institutions with higher proportions of entrants with these international A levels. UCL has large numbers of entrants from South and East Asia with these qualifications.

8.5. It was suggested that it might be possible to persuade UCAS to assign these qualifications tariff points in the same way as the UK A levels and noted that UCAS does assign tariffs to the International Baccalaureate. The OfS and league tables could also exclude the entrants who have a mix of tariff and non-tariff qualifications

from their calculations, in order to make the calculation consistent across HEIs.

8.6. Agreed – that the Deputy Director (Head of Student Data) of Academic Services provide the Chair with a summary of the qualifications tariff concerns and for the Chair to then discuss this with Russell Group peers to ascertain whether the concerns were shared and whether joint high level representation to UCAS and the OfS might be possible to address it.

Action: Mr Gary Smith and the Chair

9. Undergraduate Degree Classifications

9.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 1-11 (20-21) presented by the Head of Academic Policy and Quality Assurance (APQA), Academic Services.

9.2. The report considered analysis of UG degree classification data in 2020 to assess the impact of the 'no detriment' policy used to determine classifications. Detailed analysis of the impact of the no detriment measures put in place for student progression was being undertaken and would be reported to the next meeting.

9.3. It was noted that overall, the proportion of First class awards had increased significantly compared to previous years, while there had been a smaller increase in the proportion of 2.1 and Firsts combined. Data received by EACP in August 2020 showed that overall there had been a 1.9 percentage point increase in the final year mean mark in 2020 compared to 2019. It was considered that the change in classification profile was largely due to the application of the no detriment policy and that, in retrospect, the alternative assessment and other arrangements put in place had provided sufficient mitigation.

9.4. It was noted that feedback from external examiners had been largely positive over the measures taken in response to the COVID pandemic, though a small number were concerned with the higher level of Firsts awarded and there were suggestions to review and reconsider the alternative assessments used. More detailed analysis of External Examiners feedback would be undertaken by the Faculty Education Lead (PGT), Institute of Education (IOE).

9.5. It was noted that the no-detriment policy had been a one-off mitigation to assuage student concerns with late changes to assessment arising from the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID 19 pandemic and would not apply to assessments taken in 2020/21. The impact on awards would taper off over time. It was felt that the introduction of the no detriment policy had been the right action to take at the time as many students were highly anxious about how the alternative assessments would work and be marked. UCL was in line with other institutions and the guidance from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the OfS.

9.6. However, SU officers informed EdCom that it had already received concerns from students regarding the removal of the no-detriment policy for 2020-21. It was suggested that the rationale for this was clearly communicated to students. This might include restating that the policy was a one-off emergency measure which although accepted by external examiners, they had advised not to continue with into a second year. The rationale should also point out that the other action undertaken was enough to mitigate assessments and that, without the no detriment policy, UCL would have had a similar degree outcome profile to previous years.

9.7. The report also high-lighted an increase in the proportion of Firsts awarded to Black students (+26.5%) between 2019 and 2020 and a smaller rise for Asian students (+ 19.7%). This had narrowed the awarding gap with white students between Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students and the EACP had suggested that further analysis was undertaken of the data. The data would be shared with the BAME Attainment Project, co-led by the Faculty Tutor of Brain Sciences, which will report to the EdCom's January meeting. It was also suggested that the data was made available to the Widening Participation team in Access and Admissions.

9.8. Agreed: that Academic Services and SU officers liaise in providing communication to students explaining the rationale for the decision to discontinue the no detriment policy, in order to help address student concerns that the policy would not continue.

Action: Dr Helen Matthews and SU Officers

10. Register UCL Update

10.1. The Registrar was unable to attend the meeting to present this item.

10.2. Agreed – that the Registrar provide EdCom with a brief note providing an update on Register UCL.

Action: Ms Wendy Appleby

11. Exams and Assessment Contingency Panel (EACP) Summary of Agreed Actions

11.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 1-12 (20-21) presented by the Director of Academic Services. The report summarised the agreed actions of the EACP, up to 16 September in consideration of potential mitigations for circumstances where teaching and assessment could not be delivered as planned. It was noted that the EACP would be kept on stand-by in case required, though its membership might need to be refreshed before it next met.

11.2. The Director of Academic Services reported that some of the special arrangements for last session would continue in 2020-21, in amended form. This included adjudication of online exams under the non-exam offences procedure, and revised

Extenuating Circumstances (EC) procedure. The latter enabled self-certification to continue, but was limited to up to two non-consecutive periods of fourteen days and subject to other constraints. EACP also agreed to removal of the requirement for a second marker to be a permanent member of staff, as long as they were suitably experienced.

12. Student Support Review Group Update

12.1. The Faculty Tutor of Mathematical and Physical Sciences (MAPS) informed the Committee that the Student Support Review Group was formed to consider support for students including ECs, reasonable adjustments and Fitness to Study procedures. The Review Group had met twice before the COVID 19 lockdown, but was then on hold until August.

12.2. The Review Group was considering whether it would be possible to move to a single academic adjustment policy or if a package of policies would be more effective. It was also looking at a more consistent approach to self-certification, for which a discussion paper would shortly be circulated to faculty tutors and the SU. It was intended that changes to policy and procedures could be ready for next year and the Review Group would keep EdCom informed.

13. UCL Education Strategy: Annual Report to Council 2019-20

13.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 1-13 (20-21) presented by the Head of Strategic Engagement, the Office of the Vice-Provost (Education and Student Affairs – OVPESA). The report provided a high level summary of education change at UCL over the previous, very challenging year, documenting the progress made against the objectives in the strategy.

13.2. The report used a traffic light system, Red, Amber and Green (RAG) to visually show how the Education Strategy objectives were progressing. Red indicated that major challenges or issues were affecting the objective, Amber showed that whilst challenges existed around resourcing or governance, the objective was still progressing. Green denoted that the objective was on track to be delivered with governance and resources in place.

13.3. EdCom discussed each objective in turn and agreed the following colour grading:

- Objective 1: Personalise Student Support – Amber/Green
- Objective 2: Implement the Connected Curriculum – Green
- Objective 3: Improve Assessment and Feedback – Amber, though it was noted that there had been much progress with improved student feedback scores and through the greater adoption of online assessment in response to COVID 19.
- Objective 4: Create Cultures of Student Engagement and Leadership – Green

- Objective 5: Review and Strengthen Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Provision – Amber/Green
- Objective 6: Create a Teaching Space to meet our Needs – Amber/Red
- Objective 7: Establish Digital learning Infrastructure – Green
- Objective 8: Expand our Co-Curricular Offer – Amber

13.4. It was noted that the report would also be submitted to Academic Board and UCL Council.

14. EDCOM Annual Report To Academic Committee

14.1. Approved - the paper at EDCOM 1-14 (20-21) presented by the Secretary.

14.2. The annual report summarised EdCom's main activities in the previous session, separated thematically into sections outlining key areas such as learning and teaching, the student voice and student experience transformation.

14.3. This included key EdCom discussions on the response to the COVID 19 pandemic and subsequent assessment mitigation, reports on the UCL examination process and student engagement and representation. A further section outlined EdCom's work in improving the academic regulations, noting approval of revised chapters in the Academic Manual. A final section and related annexes outlined the key work of EdCom's sub-committees.

14.4. EdCom noted that the report was important in conveying its role in helping to improve the student experience and UCL's academic provision. The report would be presented by the Chair to Academic Committee.

15. Annual Summary of Minutes of Faculty Teaching Committees (FTC)

15.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 1-15 (20-21) presented by the Secretary.

15.2. The report presented the annual analysis of the main matters discussed at FTCs. It was noted that the committees had continued to operate well and generally meet their terms of reference, in spite of a difficult and extraordinary year meeting the challenges presented by the COVID 19 pandemic.

Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

16. Approval of Academic Partnerships

16.1. Approved - the academic partnerships recommended by the APRG paper at EDCOM 1-16 (20-21).

17. Approval of New Programmes of Study

17.1. Approved - the programmes of study recommended by PMAP at EDCOM 1-17 (20-21).

18. Minutes of Sub-Committees and Working Groups

18.1. Approved the minutes of ARQASC held on 7 April 2020 at EDCOM 1-18 (20-21).

18.2. Approved the minutes of ARQASC held on 30 June 2020 at EDCOM 1-19 (20-21).

18.3. Approved the minutes of QRSC held on 23 April 2020 at EDCOM 1-20 (20-21).

18.4. Approved the minutes of QRSC held on 2 June 2020 at EDCOM 1-21 (20-21).

19. Suspensions of Regulations

19.1. Approved – the Suspensions of Regulations at EDCOM 1-22 (20-21).

20. Any Other Business

20.1. None reported.

21. Dates of Next Meeting

21.1. The dates of the EdCom meetings for the rest of the 2020-21 session are:

- Thursday 3 December 2020 10.30am
- Tuesday 23 February 2021 10.30am
- Tuesday 27 April 2021 10.30am
- Thursday 10 June 2021 10.30am
- RESERVED MEETING Thursday 22 July 2021 10.30am

Meetings to be held on MS Teams.

Rob Traynor
Secretary to EdCom

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21 October 2020