



## Education Committee

7 December 2021

### Confirmed Minutes

Present:

Professor Deborah Gill (Chair)

Dr Ali Abolfathi; Ms Arifa Aminy; Professor Simon Banks; Mr Ayman Benmati; Professor Clare Brooks; Dr Nicole Brown; Professor Sally Day; Mr Ashley Doolan; Dr Julie Evans; Professor Alistair Greig; Ms Junqing Guo; Professor Arne Hofmann; Professor Jane Holder; Dr Joana Jacob Ramalho; Dr Rachael King; Mr Zak Liddell; Ms Blathnaid Mahony; Ms Viktoria Makai; Dr Elvira Mambetisaeva; Professor Chloe Marshall; Dr Helen Matthews; Mr Shivam Mulchandani; Professor Norbert Pachler; Professor Paola Pedarzani; Mr Derfel Owen; Professor Aeli Roberts; Mr Mike Rowson; Professor Sam Smidt; Dr Hazel Smith; Dr Fiona Strawbridge; Professor Olga Thomas and Ms Lizzie Vinton

In attendance: Professor John Mitchell (for Minute 18); Mr Simon To (for Minute 19); Ms Joanne Moles and Professor Simon Walker (for Minute 20); Ms Alison Edridge (Secretary) and Mr Rob Traynor (Assistant Secretary).

Apologies for absence were received from: Dr Jo Fraser-Pearce; Ms June Hedges; Dr Bill Sillar and Dr Stan Zochowski.

### Part I: Preliminary Business

#### 15. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

15.1. Approved – the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 October 2021 [EdCom Minutes 1-14, 2021-22] at EDCOM 2-01 (21-22), subject to the following amendment:

- i. Minute 7.6 – the Students' Union (SU) Postgraduate Officer requested additional text to emphasize that other student groups were grateful for being able to study from home during the pandemic in addition to international students. However, other feedback was received about the suggested addition "Many considered this better for their mental health" and it was agreed to change "*many*" to "*some*" as there were different student views on this. Some students had fed back that face to face (f2f) learning had a negative impact on their mental health, reporting feelings of isolation and loneliness.

#### 16. Matters Arising from the Minutes

16A UCL Student Attendance Policy [Minute 10.3 EdCom Annual Report to Academic Committee, EdCom 14.10.2021]

16A.1 It had been suggested at the last meeting that there was a need for greater clarity within the UCL Student Attendance Policy with regards to monitoring attendance, particularly as UCL no longer had a 70% attendance requirement. The Director of Academic Services and Academic Regulations Manager had since discussed this with the Here to Succeed Team and the Director of Access and Admissions.

**16B Problems with Unitu** [Minute 13A Any Other Business, EdCom 14.10.2021]

16B.1 The Registrar had agreed to check reported problems with Unitu and its integration with the student records system (SITS) with ISD colleagues. The Registrar would report back to EdCom in due course on this.

**Action: The Registrar**

**17. Chair's Action taken since the Last Meeting**

**17A Assessment Operating Model Adjustment and Method of Reassessment**

17A.1 Received – the paper at EDCOM 2-02 (21-22) which outlined Chair's Action taken to approve:

- i. Adjustment to the Assessment Operating Model to also allow some programmes to operate remotely for Term 2. It was noted some fifty programmes wished to do so, covering approximately 450-500 students.
- ii. To extend an EdCom ruling from December 2020 to 2021/21 to enable departments to approve assessment pattern decisions for trailing reassessments for modules taken in 2020/21 without the need to seek EdCom approval.

**Part II: Matters for Discussion**

**18. Regulations for Foundation Year 0 2022-23**

18.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 2-03 (21-22) introduced by the Vice-Dean (Education), Faculty of Engineering Sciences.

18.2. The paper outlined draft regulations specific to the Foundation Year 0. This was intended to help widening participation in the Faculty of Engineering Sciences based in UCL East providing a route into most Undergraduate (UG) programmes for students otherwise not meeting the entry requirements. The paper was recommended for approval to EdCom by the Academic Regulations and Quality Assurance Sub-Committee (ARQASC), following its meeting of 21 September 2021.

18.3. It was queried how students narrowly failing a module (e.g. achieving 59%) would be treated as the Foundation Year had a higher pass mark (60%) than UG programmes, did not allow condonement or second attempts and provided no interim qualification. This could leave such students from widening participation backgrounds in a precarious position after a year's study.

18.4. EdCom was informed that the Faculty intended to set up agreements with other universities on entry criteria for failing students. Students would develop a portfolio on the programme mainly through continuous assessment, which would enable early identification and support for struggling students and provide opportunities to make up marks. Nonetheless, it was important that the programme was robust enough to ensure student readiness for UG study at UCL on completion of the Foundation Year 0.

18.5. **Approved** – the Foundation Year 0 regulations at EDCOM 2-03 (21-22).

## 19. **Academic Representation Annual Report 2020-21**

19.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 2-04 (21-22) introduced by the SU Education Officer and the Policy, Governance and Insight Manager. The paper had also been received by the Student Experience Committee (StEC).

19.2. EdCom was informed that 2020-21 had again been a challenging year and the 1896 appointed academic representatives had performed admirably in often difficult circumstances. The SU had worked with representatives covering 92% of the 168 Staff Student Consultative Committees (SSCC). Feedback suggested that 76% would recommend becoming a representative. The report also summarised the achievements of the 2020 Vision project for student academic representation which had successfully drawn to a close. The SU would focus on building learning communities this year, alongside improving skill development and support to the academic representatives.

19.3. EdCom was also informed that around 1700 academic representatives had been appointed for 2021-22 so far, but there were concerns that 23 SSCCs appeared to have none and some 84 SSCCs were without a Lead Department Representative. Although training take-up had been positive, there was concern that representatives could miss out should they be appointed late. The SU was also experiencing challenges with staff shortages and was recruiting to cover this now. It was grateful for faculty and department patience.

19.4. It was queried whether this lack of student representation would be problematic for the student voice in the affected departments, or whether it was heard through other means. It was suggested that SSCCs in some instances might not be correctly positioned to meet SSCC policy, with some narrowly focussed on individual programmes and with small numbers of representatives. This was often challenging in terms of meeting the wider [Student Academic Representation policy](#).

19.5. EdCom was informed that one faculty had a large number of such SSCCs, often for clinically orientated programmes or those on short programmes such as PG Certificates with students rarely coming to campus. The SU would be engaging with the faculty concerned in the New Year to address this. It was noted that it was

important to develop a culture of student engagement for all programmes to ensure that students felt included and part of UCL.

## **20. AssessmentUCL Update**

- 20.1. Received – a presentation by the Director of Programme Development (UCL Arena) and the Head of Assessment Delivery and Platforms. The presentation slides are available on the EdCom MS Teams site and SharePoint.
- 20.2. EdCom was informed that student and staff surveys feedback revealed a mixed picture. Although 97% had accessed and used the AssessmentUCL platform without problems, 42% of staff respondents had chosen to mark outside of the platform. Of those staff using the platform, 64% provided negative feedback on their marking experience. However, 63% of student respondents provided positive feedback overall on their experience of AssessmentUCL. The feedback was considered during the development of the Assessment Operating Model 2021-22.
- 20.3. Despite the mixed feedback, it was important to recognise that the AssessmentUCL platform had performed robustly and UCL could be confident of its capabilities for online assessments, including timed examinations. Some universities which had relied on their existing Virtual Learning Environments, experienced severe difficulties with moving assessments online. The focus was now on improving the marker journey and several priorities had been identified from the feedback which were being worked on in conjunction with Wiseflow, the platform provider.
- 20.4. Evaluation of AssessmentUCL had also led to changes to the Assessment Operating Model as approved by EdCom at its last meeting, with shorter exams encouraged to reduce opportunities for academic misconduct. Consideration of assessment in the longer-term was also underway which would help develop timescales for re-designing assessment and consider practicalities such as the use of invigilation. However, there was some resistance to platform uptake, with some staff concerned with functionality, whilst some departments wished to continue with 24 hour exams outside the Assessment Operating Model. It was important to be clear on the rules for using the platform and ensure it was fully supported and rolled out. Training sessions were taking place to help with this, and it would be helpful for faculties to support communications and messaging on this.
- 20.5. Future plans for invigilated exams were queried and it was noted that whilst remote exams would continue for this session, thought was required on the types of assessment which needed to be invigilated and whether software enhancements could be utilised. It was suggested that analysis of the Assessment Operating Model data over the two years would be important to assess any impact on academic misconduct.
- 20.6. It was further noted that some students preferred 24 hour exams and were anxious about reverting to timed examinations, with concerns, for example, on technical

issues affecting submission. It was important to educate students about technical failures so that there was clear understanding of the rules. Student representatives were concerned that disabled students or those with caring responsibilities could be disadvantaged with a return to 3-hour exams and that Muslim students could find this difficult during Ramadan. It was noted that UCL publishes the examination timetable earlier than other institutions to enable students to plan and that exams had been scheduled during Ramadan prior to the pandemic, so this was being done within established frameworks. The current Support to Study review was further considering these matters.

## **21. Student Module Rejections Progress Report**

- 21.1. Received – the paper at EDCOM 2-05 (21-22) introduced by the Director of Academic Services. The paper provided an update on the impact of mitigating actions taken in respect of module rejects identified by the Module Rejections Task & Finish Group. This followed on from the Group's Interim report received by EdCom at its 22 July 2021 meeting.
- 21.2. The Task and Finish Group investigated the primary reasons for student module selection rejections and focused on a target group of 30 modules which had the highest rate of rejections. It sought to establish appropriate mitigating actions and to investigate whether, if successful, these actions could be applied across the full UCL module portfolio. The actions had resulted in a 66% reduction in the number of rejections for the target modules, with a 30% decrease in rejections overall.
- 21.3. Around half of module rejections were as a result of modules being over-subscribed, which it was hoped would be helped by earlier module registration. Other reasons included students not meeting module pre-requisites, selecting modules not suitable for the programme of study or modules restricted to the teaching department's students. Tightening of programme diets should help reduce the numbers of students attempting to choose modules that were not open to them.
- 21.4. It appeared that a variety of approaches by departments had brought about the reduction in rejections, such as reviewing and increasing module capacity, adjusting programme diets and close working with the Student Records team to identify possible improvements. It was suggested that enhancing the Tableau report which cross references student intake and historical module selection might help identify future issues.
- 21.5. EdCom also noted that there were wider, strategic concerns associated with module selection, with changes to UK demographics meaning greater numbers of students in the near future. Careful thought would be required for programme capacity and management of high demand modules. Suggestions were made for ways to increase module capacity, though care was required not to extend overall module numbers.

- 21.6. EdCom endorsed the report and continuing actions and suggested that the discussion might continue at the Faculty Tutor Forum, particularly regarding the management of high demand modules.

## **22. UCL Honours Degree Outcomes Statement**

- 22.1. Received – the paper at EDCOM 2-06 (21-22) introduced by the Academic Regulations Manager. EdCom was informed that the [UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment](#) expected UCL to publish an Honours Degree Outcomes Statement covering the 2019-20 academic session. The paper outlined the proposed statement which, following consideration by EdCom, would be submitted to Council for formal approval on 9 December 2021.
- 22.2. The statement also included a section on risks and challenges, referring to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on classification and addressed the concerns about the increase in the proportion of first class honours degrees awarded by UCL. A Degree Outcomes Steering Group was proposed in order to investigate these matters further and make recommendations for action (see Minute 23 below).
- 22.3. **Approved** – the UCL Honours Degree Outcomes Statement 2019-20 at EdCom 2-06 (21-22).

## **23. Establishing a UCL Degree Outcomes Steering Group**

- 23.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 2-07 (21-22) introduced by the Academic Regulations Manager. Following discussion at the previous meeting, an academic-led steering group was proposed to investigate the issue of grade inflation and the increase in the proportion of first class honours degrees awarded at UCL. The Group's proposed terms of reference and membership were submitted for formal approval.
- 23.2. EdCom broadly welcomed the draft Steering Group Terms of Reference (ToRs), including exploration of the merits of a Grade Point Average (GPA) marking scale as a possible solution. It was suggested that the Group also consider Postgraduate Taught (PGT) award data as there was also grade inflation at that level, with an increase in the numbers of distinctions and merits awarded. It was noted that PGT 2021 data would be available early in the next term. It was further suggested that the Group consider modules with coursework assessment that had not changed significantly during the pandemic to identify any underlying inflation in marking, i.e. where alternative assessment introduced for COVID-19 was not a factor.
- 23.3. A number of suggestions were made for the Steering Group membership, including inviting former members of UCL's GPA Working Group which considered the possibility of UCL adopting this model a decade ago. The Group might also benefit from members recruited beyond EdCom, including programme directors and directors of education. It was further suggested that additional student representatives were

added to the Group, along with the one representative proposed in the draft Terms of Reference.

23.4. **Agreed** – that EdCom members interested in joining the Steering Group contact the EdCom Assistant Secretary.

**Action** – EdCom Members to note

23.5. **Approved** – the UCL Degree Outcomes Steering Group terms of reference and membership at EDCOM 2-07 (21-22), subject to further action following the EdCom discussion.

## 24. Proposal for a Digital Accessibility Policy

24.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 2-08 (21-22) introduced by the Director of Digital Education. The paper proposed a new UCL Digital Accessibility Policy, which had been developed as part of the ISD Digital Accessibility Project. It was intended to ensure that UCL online content was accessible to all, improve staff engagement and reduce the risk of receiving challenges under relevant legislation and regulations.

24.2. The paper would be considered for approval by the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Committee. It had so far been considered by the Digital Accessibility Strategic Oversight Group (DASOG), and feedback had also been received from disabled staff and students and Vice Deans for Equality Diversity and Inclusion.

24.3. The policy aimed to recognise that 100% accessibility was not currently realistic, acknowledging that existing services have problems, including limited choice for learning platforms, the sheer volume of teaching content (often with specialist subject material) and recordings. It was acknowledged that if the policy was overly burdensome, there was a danger that departments could remove content or discourage lecture recordings. Support would be available to help staff with teaching content, with funding for 3,000 hours of student time available to help individual students or correct captions etc.

24.4. Concerns raised by EdCom regarding the academic impact of the policy largely focussed on transcripts for video and audio recordings. It was agreed that whilst LectureCast's auto-caption functionality had improved, accuracy was still low for recording non-native English speakers. A member reported that it had taken four hours to correct a half hour transcript. This was a particularly acute problem for hearing impaired staff and took academic staff away from teaching. It was noted that staff were under no obligation to correct captions and that any problems with caption accuracy should be reported to Digital Education. It was further suggested that the focus on such materials was targeted at those students receiving support, particularly those with a Summary of Reasonable Adjustments (SORA).

24.5. **Agreed:** that EdCom endorse the proposed policy and advise the Digital Education team to work with non-native English speaking staff and students to identify and seek

to address issues with transcription functionality on LectureCast and other tools.

**Action:** Director of Digital Education to note

## 25. Suspensions of Regulations Annual Report

- 25.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 2-09 (21-22) introduced by the Assistant Secretary. The report summarised the requests for suspensions of regulations (SoRs) and other regulatory decisions which required approval by the Vice-Provost (Education and Student Experience) and EdCom Chair. The requests were reported to EdCom during the 2020-21 academic session, with consideration and approval of the cases delegated to the Director of Academic Services and the Head of Academic Policy and Quality Assurance.
- 25.2. EdCom noted that the most common UG SoR was for exceeding or failing to meet Credit Requirements for Progression. It was noted that the faculties concerned were aware of the programmes responsible and were making efforts to address this issue.
- 25.3. One Faculty noted a recent increase in Late Extenuating Circumstances requests among overseas students. This appeared to be exacerbated by the increase in the number of first class degrees awarded at UCL, a greater fear of failing the degree and interim awards such as PG Diplomas often not being valued in the students' home country. It was suggested that cultural differences could also be a factor with students from some countries less likely to ask for support until later. The current Support to Study review was considering these matters and it was suggested that it might wish to consider an awareness drive with students regarding the procedures, as well as how to ensure that UCL was aligned with the OIA expectations.
- 25.4. **Approved** - the Suspensions of Regulations Annual Report at EDCOM 2-09 (21-22).

## 26. Industrial Action Mitigation

- 26.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 2-10 (21-22) introduced by the Academic Regulations Manager. The paper intended to update the existing regulations in line with the assessment operating model and attendance policy and remove duplication with the COVID Emergency exam board procedures.
- 26.2. EdCom was asked to consider and approve the following:
- i. Re-establishment of the Examinations and Assessments Contingency Panel (EACP), including the updated Terms of Reference and Membership.
  - ii. Revisions to the following sections of the UCL Academic Manual 2021/22:
    - Chapter 6, [Annex 6.6.2: Managing the impact of industrial action on assessment, progression, and award](#)
    - Chapter 4, [Annex 4.3.6: Boards of Examiners Emergency Procedures](#).
  - iii. A number of additional minor amendments to the regulations as outlined in EDCOM 2-10 (21-22).



- iv. Two other proposals:
  - To confirm that all Boards of Examiners should be held virtually during 2021-22;
  - Whether faculties should have full responsibility for any mark exclusion mitigations, removing the option to delegate some of this work to programme board of examiners. This would tighten up the regulations in the light of grade inflation and ensure strong faculty oversight.

26.3. It was queried whether it would be possible to amend the mark exclusion mitigation to require faculty oversight only where the component weighting was greater than 10%. There was a concern about the burden on faculties that have programmes with large numbers of modules with many small components. However, it was noted that the process for doing so would be made as light touch as possible by Student Records.

26.4. EdCom noted that the revised Annex 6.6.2 in the paper was incorrect: Managing the impact of industrial action on assessment, progression, and award. The version presented was the existing Academic Manual document and did not show the proposed changes to the text. The cover paper and other sub-sections of the rest of the paper were correct. Nevertheless, it was not possible to approve the proposed changes to Annex 6.6.2 at the meeting.

**Agreed:** to circulate the correct paper following the meeting and invite comments and suggestions on the text from members. It would then be considered for approval by Chair's action, subject to any necessary further editing.

**Action: EdCom members and officers to note (Secretary to arrange circulation of the document).**

### **Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information**

#### **27. Approval of New Programmes of Study**

27.1. Approved - the programmes of study recommended by PMAP at EDCOM 2-11 (21-22).

#### **28. Minutes of Sub-Committees and Working Groups**

28.1. Approved the minutes of ARQASC held on 30 June 2021 at EDCOM 2-12 (21-22).

28.2. Approved the minutes of the Quality Review Sub-Committee (QRSC) held on 8 June 2021 at EDCOM 2-13 (21-22).

#### **29. Suspensions of Regulations Report**

29.1. Approved the Suspensions of Regulations at EDCOM 2-14 (21-22).

#### **30. Any Other Business**

#### **30A Office of the Independent Adjudicator Judgement**

30A.1 The Director of Academic Services informed EdCom of a recommendation by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) relating to a partially justified UCL case. It stated that academic departments should be reminded of “the importance of marking record keeping and being able to provide evidence that they have correctly followed UCL marking procedures and policies”. Faculty Tutors were requested to cascade this reminder to departments.

### **31. Dates of Next Meeting**

31.1. The dates of the EdCom meetings for the rest of the 2021-22 session were:

- Thursday, 10 February 2022, 10:30 - 13:00
- Tuesday, 26 April 2022, 14:00 - 16:30
- Thursday, 9 June 2022, 10:30 - 13:00
- Reserved Meeting: Tuesday 19 July 2022, 14:00 - 16:30\*

Meetings to be held on MS Teams.

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5 January 2022