



Education Committee Extraordinary Meeting

8 January 2021

Confirmed Minutes

Present:

Professor Anthony Smith (Chair)

Ms Wendy Appleby; Dr Simon Banks; Mr Ayman Benmati; Professor Clare Brooks; Professor Nora Colton; Ms Yasmeen Daoud; Mr Ian David; Mr Ashley Doolan; Dr Julie Evans; Dr Jo Fraser-Pearce; Professor Deborah Gill; Professor Alistair Greig; 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; Dr Fiona Strawbridge; Professor Olga Thomas and Ms Lizzie Vinton.

In attendance: Ms Katie Price and Mr Rob Traynor (Secretary).

Apologies for absence were received from: Ms Megan Gerrie and Ms June Hedges.

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 response to the national lockdown announced on 4 January 2021.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

2. National Lockdown Response

- 2.1. Received - Paper 1: Supporting Students through Assessments, introduced by the Chair and the Director of Academic Services (AS).

- 2.2. Unfortunately the Covid-19 pandemic had worsened again, with a new variant leading to much stricter lockdown measures than anyone had hoped. This further disruption was causing students real concern and they were worried that they would not be able to do their best work. UCL was faced with a complex set of challenges: we want students to have every opportunity to demonstrate their full academic potential despite the circumstances of the pandemic and to ensure that a UCL degree continues to be regarded as amongst the best in the world. It had therefore been agreed that the no detriment policy for 2020-21 should be revisited.
- 2.3. EdCom acknowledged the significant disruption faced by students and the effects this was having on their mental health and well-being. It also noted that the situation differed from 2019-20, where UCL had faced an unforeseen crisis. A great deal of planning had since been undertaken to take account of the new circumstances and adapt teaching and assessments to online learning. Changes had also been made to Extenuating Circumstances and online examinations to mitigate the disruption that students were experiencing.
- 2.4. The paper proposed an evidence-based approach for 2020-21 assessments, where UCL would wait for students' results to be received before comparing them to the results of previous cohorts and, if necessary, taking steps to ensure that this year's students were not disadvantaged. A three-stage process was suggested, checking the marks for individual modules and then programme cohort year means and applying scaling where necessary, with additional consideration being possible in defined circumstances for individual students who had demonstrated capability at a higher level but did not meet standard criteria for a higher classification.
- 2.5. This approach aimed to build on UCL's experiences last year, which had included pre-defined changes to classification where only the best 50% of modules from 2019/20 counted. However, later analysis of the results showed that this had, in practice, been unnecessary as individual module marks and final weighted means had been comparable to previous years, and were in fact slightly better.
- 2.6. The student representatives reported widespread concerns from the student body regarding the new lockdown and the ensuing disruption to learning. A petition signed by over 2000 people had been received by UCL calling for a No Detriment policy to be applied again this year. Similar petitions had been received by other institutions including members of the Russell Group. The Students' Union (SU) had also received a great deal of correspondence from worried students, and felt that students had not been reassured by the statement issued by the [Russell Group in response](#).
- 2.7. UCL's proposals were in line with the rest of the Russell Group and aimed to reassure students, in advance, that UCL would take affirmative action if results were out of line with those from previous years. However the student representatives were concerned that this would not alleviate students' anxieties in advance; they felt that mitigation was needed to provide reassurance and reduce the stress and mental

health difficulties which students were experiencing now. Many students felt that they were in a worse position this year, and some had now had two years of disruption. Students felt that it was unfair to rule out pre-agreed changes to classifications, and that the current proposals did not go far enough.

- 2.8. EdCom members also raised concerns that classification changes would undermine departments' efforts to re-design programmes and assessments. Departments had worked very hard to ensure that students would still be able to meet learning outcomes and achieve comparable results. It was also imperative that UCL protected academic standards and maintained the value of both UCL and UK degrees.
- 2.9. Some concerns were also raised about changing individual student outcomes (stage 3 of the proposals). It was felt that statistical analysis and scaling would be possible at the level of individual modules and year means but it would be difficult for exam boards to make fair and consistent judgments on the classification of individuals. Clear rules and guidance would be required for exam boards to make these decisions, and some would potentially need expert input from statisticians.
- 2.10. The national situation had changed significantly since the Enhanced Extenuating Circumstances Procedure had been written in October, with faculties reporting that some students had used up their two self-certifications, and others noting that clinicians had now been recalled to the NHS. EdCom discussed whether further changes could be made, such as increasing the number of occasions for self-certification, allowing departments to waive evidence requirements etc. Plans were already in place to handle technical issues in online exams via a separate, simplified process. Solutions would need to avoid the exponential increase in departmental workload experienced last year under the open self-certification policy.
Action: Academic Regulations Manager, Chair of Student Support Review Group
- 2.11. It was noted that students did not seem to be aware of the range of mitigations which UCL has already put in place and that further communications were needed to provide reassurance.
Action: OVPESA Officers

3. Re-Establishment of Examinations and Assessments Contingency Panel

- 3.1. Received - Paper 2: Re-Establishment of the EACP, introduced by the Director of Academic Services (AS).
- 3.2. The paper outlined proposals to re-establish EACP to make decisions concerning teaching and assessment in response to Covid 19. The paper proposed that the EACP membership remain broadly the same as last year, but include an additional exam board chair. The consultation arrangements with the SU, Faculty Tutors, Academic Services and Office of the Vice-Provost (Education and Student Affairs –

OVPEESA) would also continue. EACP would also take account of sector guidance and best practice in reviewing proposals for mitigation. It was also expected that other exam board chairs might be called on for a Task and Finish group to advise on the use of performance statistics in exam boards.

- 3.3. It was suggested that additional EdCom meetings were also scheduled to provide input on decision-making while allowing the panel to remain agile.

Action: Secretary

- 3.4. It was queried how the EACP and the Academic Regulations and Quality Assurance Sub-Committee (ARQASC) would work together as there was potential for duplication. It was noted that EACP would focus only on short-term amendments to regulations. ARQASC would continue its longer term work in scrutinising and improving academic regulations. Duplication would be minimised as the ARQASC Chair and several members were also EACP members. The ARQASC Chair confirmed that he was happy with the proposal to re-establish EACP and to serve on it.

- 3.5. Approved – the re-establishment of the Examinations and Assessments Contingency Panel.

4. Office for Students Consultation (Regulating Quality and Standards in Higher Education)

- 4.1. Received – Paper 3: UCL's Draft Response to the Office for Students (OfS) Consultation on Regulating Quality and Standards, introduced by the Director of AS.

- 4.2. The OfS was consulting on proposals to change the regulation of quality and standards for higher education providers. The paper outlined UCL's draft response. EdCom welcomed the response and agreed with the concerns of many institutions about the significant reduction in externality.

- 4.3. EdCom members were invited to send comments and suggestions on the draft consultation response to Mr Dan Derricott, Head of Academic Policy and Quality Assurance and Deputy Director of AS (email: dan.derricott@ucl.ac.uk).

Action: All members

Rob Traynor
Secretary to EdCom

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

20 January 2021