



## Education Committee

8 March 2022

### Confirmed Minutes

Present:

Professor Kathy Armour (Chair)

Dr Ali Abolfathi; Ms Arifa Aminy; Mr Ayman Benmati; Professor Sally Day; Mr Ashley Doolan; Dr Julie Evans; Dr Jo Fraser-Pearce; Ms Megan Gerrie; Professor Deborah Gill; Professor Arne Hofmann; Dr Joana Jacob Ramalho; Mr Zak Liddell; Ms Blathnaid Mahony; Ms Viktoria Makai; Dr Elvira Mambetisaeva; Mr Shivam Mulchandani; Professor Norbert Pachler; Professor Paola Pedarzani; Professor Aeli Roberts; Mr Mike Rowson; Dr Bill Sillar; Professor Sam Smidt; Dr Hazel Smith; Dr Fiona Strawbridge; Professor Olga Thomas; Ms Lizzie Vinton and Dr Stan Zochowski.

In attendance: Ms Alison Edridge (Secretary) and Mr Rob Traynor (Assistant Secretary).

Observing: Ms Sandra Hinton

Apologies for absence were received from: Professor Simon Banks; Professor Clare Brooks; Mr Ian Davis; Professor Alistair Greig; Ms June Hedges; Professor Jane Holder; Professor Chloe Marshall; Dr Helen Matthews and Mr Derfel Owen.

#### **48. 2022-27 Strategic plan consultation: Education Priorities and Programmes**

48.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 3-04 (21-22) introduced by the Chair, which was the fifth in series of discussion papers to inform UCL's strategic direction. The paper had been developed from the Chair's discussions with staff and the Students' Union following her arrival at UCL, as well consideration of UCL's performance in NSS and PTES. Staff and students had similar pain points, for example, assessment load and the ability to deliver mental health support for students. UCL's performance in the NSS both in the nationally (113<sup>th</sup> for overall satisfaction) and within London (9<sup>th</sup> out of 25 institutions for teaching) was of concern. This extraordinary meeting of EdCom was an opportunity for members to contribute views in response to the proposals set out in the paper.

48.2. The external context with regards to student fees meant that additional funding from the government was highly unlikely. The significant reduction in real terms of the undergraduate home fee rate since 2012 meant that institutions were being required to do more with less. Consideration therefore needed to be given to how to relieve pressures and improve the experience of students and staff, building on UCL's strengths and its distinctiveness as a research-intensive institution, as well as

addressing current weaknesses. The student voice was not as embedded as in some other institutions and it would be vital in the future to ensure that students played an integral role working alongside staff to shape their education.

- 48.3. The Education Priorities and Programmes area set out four proposed education projects to address analyses that had been undertaken of UCL's current position and discussions that had taken place with students and staff. These were: (i) the design and delivery of a UCL Teaching and Assessment Framework (TAF) to codify teaching excellence at UCL; (ii) an Empowering Programme Architecture framework to ensure UCL would be futures-focused, unbounded and sustainable; (iii) creation of a new sector-leading Institute for Higher Education Development and Support (HEDS) bringing together several existing UCL activities and functions; and (iv) modernising the structure of the Academic Teaching Year to improve the student experience and create space for a distinctive UCL unbounded approach to education. The Chair invited comments and feedback on the proposals.
- 48.4. A member noted that a planned review of their department's Masters degrees had been paused as clarity was required on institutional changes, for example those relating to the academic year first. The Chair noted that substantial changes at institutional level would require a long lead-in time in order to ensure compliance with consumer law. The implementation of a new academic year, for example, might require a 3-year lead-in. Departments were therefore advised not to wait to make changes or improvements or to develop new programmes.
- 48.5. Support was expressed for enabling students to undertake fieldwork and internships through a new TAF and academic year structure. However, these were demanding on staff time, required funding and availability of opportunities could be affected by the state of the economy. It would therefore be important to ensure the offering was sustainable and to learn from the experiences of other institutions that already had established offerings.
- 48.6. There was support for enabling interdisciplinary opportunities within programmes but it would be important that students built an appropriate level of subject expertise first. This could mean, for example, the first year being core with increasing possibilities for choice in the second year onwards.
- 48.7. A member noted that survey scores tended to be higher where there was good professional services support and a good partnership between professional services and academic staff. They considered that the importance of professional services staff in providing an excellent student experience could be enhanced in the document. The Chair agreed that professional services staff played a significant role in students' sense of belonging and that it would be important to work as a community to address the issues students have been raising repeatedly about some aspects of their experience.

- 48.8. The government has made it clear that they are expecting a return to in-person face-to-face teaching and it was queried if it would be possible to retain changes to education delivery arising from the pandemic that had worked well. The Chair noted that there was particular sensitivity and external pressure regarding how programmes would be delivered in the next academic year in light of the challenges faced by students and the loss of on-campus in-person teaching. However, UCL had been invited to be part of an OfS panel that was being set up to consider future delivery of higher education, which it was hoped would provide scope for further developments in the use of online and blended learning in the future.
- 48.9. It was pleasing to see a focus on mental health and wellbeing throughout the paper. It was striking that there were a number of basic issues that needed to be addressed. Concern was expressed that where intensive actions were required to address low-performing areas, that associated plans would be sensitive to staff workloads. Reverse mentoring was suggested as a possible effective way to amplify the student voice and get behind the quantitative results from student surveys. The Chair noted that the intention was to design in arrangements and structures that made things easier rather than trying to fix problems reactively.
- 48.10. It was suggested that consideration should be given to how to incorporate extra-curricular activities (e.g. participation in clubs and societies) within programmes to enable all students to benefit from them during their time at UCL. The Chair confirmed that it would be possible to design this into structures if the UCL community decided as a principle that this should be a feature of all programmes.
- 48.11. EdCom was informed that the paper would be considered by Academic Board in the following week, with a view to determining whether there was broad agreement for the proposed projects to proceed for further consideration. Detailed project plans would be developed once it was clear which projects were supported for exploration and this would not be clear until project one was complete.

#### **49. Any other business**

- 49.1. The SU Postgraduate Officer asked whether the Student Learning Fund would be put in place for students whose teaching had been cancelled due to strike action as students would appreciate this being set up as in previous years. The Chair confirmed that it would first need to be determined whether the mitigations put in place by departments had enabled students to meet their learning outcomes. This could be reviewed at the end of the academic year to determine the impact. It has been agreed, however, that strike-related salary savings would be allocated to a student hardship fund administered by the SU.
- 49.2. The Chair thanked the Faculty Tutor for the Joint Faculties and other colleagues for their work on supporting students who had been affected by the conflict in Ukraine.

#### **50. Dates of Future Meetings**

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

- Thursday, 7 April 2022, 10:00 – 13:00 (Extraordinary meeting)
- 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.

Alison Edridge (Secretary) and Rob Traynor (Assistant Secretary)

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