Education Committee

10 February 2022

Confirmed Minutes

Present:

Professor Kathy Armour (Chair)

Dr Ali Abolfathi; Ms Arifa Aminy; Professor Simon Banks; Professor Clare Brooks; Mr Ian Davis; Professor Sally Day; 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; Ms Viktoria Makai; Dr Elvira Mambetisaeva; Professor Chloe Marshall; Dr Helen Matthews; Mr Shivam Mulchandan; Professor Norbert Pachler; Professor Paola Pedarzani; Mr Derfel Owen; Professor Aeli Roberts; Dr Bill Sillar; Professor Sam Smidt; Dr Fiona Strawbridge; Professor Olga Thomas; Ms Lizzie Vinton and Dr Stan Zochowski.

In attendance: Ms Sarah West (for Minute 38); Ms Alison Edridge (Secretary) and Mr Rob Traynor (Assistant Secretary).

Apologies for absence were received from: Professor Jane Holder; Dr Joana Jacob Ramalho; Mr Mike Rowson and Dr Hazel Smith.

The Chair thanked the previous EdCom Chair, Professor Deborah Gill, on behalf of the members for all her work on the Committee and wished her well in her new role as Vice-President (Education and Student Experience) at the University of Southampton.

Part I: Preliminary Business

32.   Minutes of the Previous Meeting

32.1.   Approved – the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 December 2021 [EdCom Minutes 15-31, 2021-22] at EDCOM 2-01 (21-22).

33.   Matters Arising from the Minutes

33A   Industrial Action Mitigation [Minute 26 EdCom 07.12.2021]

33A.1 Received – the paper at EdCom 3-02 (21-22) to formally note the reinstatement of the Examinations and Assessment Contingency Panel (EACP), following notification by the University and College Union (UCU) of further strike action in Term 2. This would ensure a governance structure was in place to make urgent decisions regarding teaching and assessment. EdCom had approved updated terms of reference for EACP at its last meeting as part of a series of papers to update existing regulations for dealing with emergency situations and industrial action.

33A.2 It was queried whether there were any plans for reinstatement of the Learning Opportunities Fund to provide compensation to students who had lost teaching due to strike action. EdCom was informed that the group that had overseen the fund previously was being re-established. It was noted that tuition fee refunds could only be submitted when it was clear whether or not sufficient mitigation had been put in place to support students to achieve their learning outcomes.

34. Chair's Action taken since the Last Meeting

34.1 Received – the papers at EDCOM 3-03 (21-22) which outlined Chair's Action taken by the previous Chair to approve:

    i. Updates to Academic Manual Chapter 6, Annex 6.6.2 Managing the Impact of Industrial Action on Assessment, Progression and Award. This was circulated for comment following the December 2021 meeting as an incorrect version had been included in the papers.

    ii. An inquorate Board of Examiners in the Institute of Education (IOE). Written assurances were provided of the additional steps taken to uphold the integrity of the assessment process.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

35. Ambitions for Education

35.1. The Chair reported that the Education Priorities and Programmes paper of the consultation on the new Strategic Plan would be considered by Council on 18 February 2021, following which it would go out for wider consultation.

35.2. By way of context, the Chair noted that the UG fee cap was set in 2012 with only one uplift which meant that its real value had been eroded, and there was increasing pressure on institutions to do more with less. At the same time, students and graduates were subject to changes to their loan repayment terms leading to increased costs of undertaking a degree and greater focus on value for money. UCL needed to look ahead to what the students of the future would want, how it could prepare for the next 10 years, and engage to help shape the future. A particular constraint and concern for UCL was its estate and teaching infrastructure, which had been subject to under-investment in previous years and was not currently used efficiently. The effectiveness of the current funding model would need to be considered because constraints on space meant UCL could not recruit more students to increase departmental funding. The Chair suggested that UCL could be a trailblazer and should be more ambitious in its approach to education.

35.3. Whilst there was enthusiasm about the development of a new strategy, it was queried what the plans were in the immediate future as Faculties were receiving questions about what the operating model for 2022/23 would be. It was suggested that interim guidance including on the use of online lectures would be helpful. The Chair reported that she and the Provost had recently been asked to meet the Minster of State for

Universities who was seeking explanations from institutions about what they were doing with regards to face-to-face teaching in light of complaints about lack of on campus provision from students and parents. There was a possibility that the government might end all remaining Covid restrictions within the next month and UCL had an obligation to offer in-person learning in line with its contract with students and consumer protection legislation.

35.4. It was noted that students did not have a settled view on whether learning should be online or face-to-face and whether this should be the same from week to week. In general, however, students wanted the benefits of both face-to-face and online learning and to have the choice of how they engaged to meet their own needs. With regards to the operating model next year, the starting point would be that programmes would provide on campus face-to-face learning as this was what had been advertised and was the basis on which students had decided to come to UCL. Any decisions about online delivery around this would need to take place with this in mind and through discussions with students about what had worked over the past two years. It would also be important for departments to carefully consider their approach to assessment in 2022-23. A large scale return to using traditional examinations would not be appropriate given the assessment experience of all students over the last 3 years.

35.5. It was noted that in the longer-term, it was not expected that there would be a blanket policy with regards to the balance between face-to-face and online learning, but that a set of principles would be in place to be adapted to different types of programmes. For example, a principle may be that core content and recorded lectures could be online such that in-person lectures could then be more interactive.

35.6. Clarification was requested regarding the institutional position on whether students would need to be present for Term 3 for UG programmes this year where this was mainly used for exams. The Chair noted that students could not be required to remain on campus if there was no face-to-face activity. The Chair further noted that current structure of the academic year and the lack of UG teaching in Term 3 was problematic for several reasons, and this required review. Students were paying tuition and accommodation fees for an academic year even though activity in Term 3 was largely limited to exams which could be taken anywhere if they continued to be online. It was also noted that with an increase in coursework and a variety of assessment types submitted close to teaching, the summer term had become rather sparse for some students. There were significant pressures on staff and students in relation to teaching, assessment and marking which was currently compressed into two terms. For students who were not assessed until the end of the academic year, it was difficult to identify and act on awarding gaps and these were then baked in for subsequent years. It was also noted that the academic year structure would need to accommodate anticipated changes to how students would be studying in the future. The government was seeking a more flexible model to enable students to bank

credits and take breaks in learning. Growth in degree apprenticeships which offered a different way of learning was also expected.

35.7. The Chair noted that the approach at UG level was the most pressing as this was the current focus of regulation within the sector, but there would be increasing attention on postgraduate (PG) provision. The PG National Student Survey (NSS) pilot would be opening in April 2022, which was expected to have a higher response rate than the PG Taught Experience Survey (PTES). UCL would receive useful and interesting data from this including splits for different student groups such as full-time, part time, gender and ethnicity.

35.8. **Agreed:** An additional meeting of EdCom would be scheduled in March to discuss the Education Priorities and Programmes consultation paper of the Strategic Plan. **Action: Chair and Secretary to note**

36.   QRSC Report to EdCom on Work to Eliminate the BAME Awarding Gap

36.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 3-04 (21-22) introduced by the Chair of Quality Review Sub-Committee (QRSC). The paper outlined the work of a QRSC Task Group set up to support a UCL Strategic Plan objective to eliminate the Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) awarding gap for UG home students by 2024. EdCom was informed that it was unlikely that this objective would be met and its support was requested with making a step-change in this area over the next two years. The paper set out four recommendations to accelerate progress with this work for EdCom's approval.

36.2. The availability of data was discussed, in particular whether it was possible to identify awarding gaps at module level which would support work to make problematic modules more inclusive, as well as at mid-year assessment points and for individual students so it was clear where support should be targeted. EdCom was informed that the data was currently available by year and that it would be possible to break it down by module. Consideration was required of how to enable monitoring of particular groups, as well as individual students to reflect that these may require different actions and interventions. It was reported that Portico did not currently hold information on assessment dates but this would be changing to support the further rollout of AssessmentUCL. The introduction of an online workflow for the Extenuating Circumstances (EC) procedures would also require assessment dates to be held within Portico.

36.3. EdCom was informed that two departments within the Joint Faculties with large awarding gaps were undertaking work with members of the project team regarding the data for their programmes. This had established that by pooling modules with shared characteristics (e.g. all core modules), it was possible to address issues with statistical significance of results at individual module level. Most departments would not be able to engage in this type of analysis and this highlighted the importance of

working towards the central provision of management data and dashboards to support staff.

36.4. Student representatives thanked the Task Group and project team for the work undertaken but expressed some disappointment with progress made to date. EdCom was encouraged to consider the actions taken during the pandemic, such as the no detriment policy and the self-certification policy for ECs, that had appeared to narrow the awarding gap. It was noted, however, that it would be important to balance this with government continuing concerns about grade inflation and the need to ensure that First Class degrees at UCL continued to hold their value within the sector and with employers.

36.5. EdCom noted that the awarding gap was also an issue at postgraduate taught (PGT) level and it was suggested this should be included in the BAME Awarding Gap project, particularly as UCL is predominantly a PG institution. The Chair of QRSC confirmed that the commitment made to reducing the awarding gap had been for UG home students only as part of the Access and Participation Plan, although data for PGT students was also being considered. Whilst the project team would be happy to undertake work on the PGT awarding gap formally, this would require additional resource and institutional support.

36.6. The wider structural issues within society, the awarding gap developing when students were in primary school and how UCL might tackle these were also discussed. However, the ability of universities to influence work undertaken in schools to address these issues was limited and UCL needed to focus resource on actions within its direct control

36.7. Approved: the following recommendations at EDCOM 3-04 (21-22):

i. The BAME Awarding Gap team and QRSC Task Group to continue their work to support colleagues to make meaningful progress in closing the gap for UG Home students by 2024.
ii. A broader, dedicated, discrete project to be established for the next 2 years and the project to be formally monitored by EdCom termly via a report produced by the QRSC Task Group together with the Faculty Awarding Gap Leads reporting to Academic Committee as appropriate
iii. A senior champion to be identified who is a member of University Management Committee (UMC), to set expectation and pace amongst the Deans and maintain awareness in UMC via management data added to the data dashboard.
iv. A review of progress in eliminating the UG Home awarding gap to be a standing item on all relevant exam boards for the 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic sessions.

36.8. Additionally, the Chair of QRSC requested central support for the creation of dashboards of data analysis on modules grouped by type. It was noted that this may

be subject to funding being available to resource this and it would also need to be clear about the requirements for grouping modules with shared characteristics for data analysis.

37.   UCL Postgraduate Taught Masters Degree Classifications 2021

37.1. Received – the paper at EDCOM 3-04 (21-22) introduced by the Academic Regulations Manager which showed that the proportion of distinctions in 2021 had reduced in comparison with 2020 but was approximately 9 percentage points higher than in the years immediately prior to the pandemic.

37.2. It was noted that average module marks were similar in 2020 and 2021 and only slightly higher than in previous years. The no detriment policy of an extended borderline in 2021 did not apply to PG taught masters programmes in the IOE as these use letter grades and the proportion of distinctions for the IOE was only 2 percentage points higher in 2021 than it was in 2019. It was therefore likely that the higher proportion of distinctions in 2020 and 2021 was caused by the no detriment policies in place in those years. The Degree Outcomes Steering Group (DOSG) would consider the data further and modelling would be undertaken to control for different variables to identify causes.

37.3. Further discussion was required within UCL and within the sector on defining what a reasonable profile of degree outcomes should be given the student intake profile. It was noted that it would be useful to undertake benchmarking of outcomes at subject level with institutions with similar entry requirements to UCL.

37.4. EdCom was informed that the IOE was considering moving from using letter grades to numerical marks and that the Bartlett School of Architecture was considering the opposite. In addition, the DOSG had been asked to explore the merits of a Grade Point Average (GPA) marking scale as a possible solution to grade inflation. The Chair noted that her previous institution, the University of Birmingham, had adopted a GPA system, but the normal classification continued to be used alongside the GPA as it was mainly international students who wanted it. It was not anticipated that GPA would address problems of grade inflation and it was noted that there was no universal GPA scale.

38.   OfS Consultations on Teaching and Student Excellence

38.1. Received – the papers at EDCOM 3-06 (21-22), which provided a briefing on three Office for Students (OfS) consultations, and 3-06a (21-22), which presented a draft response to the consultations for which feedback from EdCom was sought.

38.2. The OfS consultations set out proposed changes to condition B3 on student outcomes of the OfS regulatory framework, proposed changes to the TEF exercise and framework, and proposals for the construction, presentation and interpretation of the data comprising the evidence base for condition B3 and the Teaching Excellence

Framework (TEF). The draft UCL response had been developed with input from the Teaching and Assessment Group and colleagues in relevant Professional Services.

38.3. There was concern about the proposed submission window of September-November 2022 for the TEF. The OfS was proposing that there would be an optional student submission of 10 pages. However, the timing would mean that programme representatives would not yet be in place and the sabbatical officers would have only recently started in their roles. The OfS also appeared to have revived a proposal to scrape social media for student views on institutions which was of concern.

38.4. It was noted that TEF assessments would be at institutional level only and plans for subject-level TEF had been shelved which would reduce the burden of assessment. However, institutions' subject-level data would be published by the OfS and it was possible this could be used in the compilation of subject league tables.

38.5. Concern was expressed about some of the proposed student outcomes measures, in particular what constituted a graduate level job and the use of graduate earnings data. This would be challenging for certain subject areas and it was considered important that the vital contributions that certain lower paid careers made to society, for example in the arts and caring, were recognised when assessing institutional performance.

38.6. The OfS was proposing that the data used in the monitoring of condition B3 on student outcomes would include postgraduate research (PGR) students. It was noted that this would require UCL to manage PGR degree outcomes as rigorously as it did for taught provision and that the academic governance and management arrangements for research degrees would need to support this. Consideration should be given to the current designation of PGR students at UCL as early career researchers. This did not reflect their status as students and failed to recognise that many would not pursue research careers. The Chair noted that she would be discussing these issues including the roles and responsibilities of Departmental Graduate Tutors and the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) with the Director of the Doctoral School and the VP-RIGE.
Action: Chair of EdCom to discuss governance and management of research degrees with the Director of the Doctoral School and the VP RIGE.

38.7. Members of EdCom were asked to send any further comments on UCL's proposed response to the consultations to srs-compliance@ucl.ac.uk by 17 February 2022.

39.   Affiliate Programmes Task Group

39.1. Received – a verbal update from the Co-Chairs of the Affiliate Programmes Task Group, Professor Arne Hofmann and Professor Simon Banks, on the work of the Task Group. The Group had been established by EdCom in July 2021 to review the curriculum offer for affiliate students to identify possible improvements in curriculum, policy and processes in response to issues with the affiliate student experience.

These included issues with the application process, module selection, overall coherence and ownership of the activity, with concerns raised by students as well as partner institutions.

39.2. EdCom was informed that the Task Group was considering the application process and timeline to align these with earlier deadlines for module selection. The principle should be that UCL was committing to students' module selections at the point of making an offer. However, there were barriers to doing this in practice and it would require a change in the approach to educational planning, improvements to SITS and the ring-fencing of places for affiliate students. The Task Group was also discussing the development of an affiliate student hub, which would provide a central portal for interactions with partners and students, deal with queries and provide structural support. The Co-Chairs would discuss next steps for taking forward this work with the Director of Academic Services and the Registrar.

39.3. It was noted that some of the issues with the affiliate student experience were related to broader structural challenges within UCL, such as when the timetable for the following academic year was published and the current timing of module assessment. It was hoped that wider strategic actions such as amendments to the academic year structure would also improve the affiliate student experience.

40. Faculty Teaching Committee (FTC) Annual Report

40.1. Received and approved - the paper at EDCOM 3-07 (21-22) containing an annual report on the proceedings of FTCs during 2020/21. EdCom reminded faculties to ensure that the FTCs covered all the items from their terms of reference particularly those relating to monitoring of Departmental Teaching Committees and student representatives.

Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

41. MBBS FHEQ Level

41.1. Approved – the paper at EDCOM 3-08 (21-22) confirming that the final two years of the 6-year MBBS programme fulfil the threshold standards for a level 7 qualification, and approval of amendment of the qualification from level 6 to level 7 to align with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

42. Approval of New Programmes of Study

42.1. Approved - the programmes of study recommended by PMAP at EDCOM 3-09 (21-22).

43. Approval of Academic Partnerships

43.1. Approved – the approval of renewals of academic partnerships and the termination of an academic partnership recommended by APRG at EDCOM 3-10 (21-22)

44.   Suspensions of Regulations Report

44.1.   Approved the Suspensions of Regulations at EDCOM 3-11 (21-22).

45.   Minutes of Sub-Committees and Working Groups

45.1.   Approved the minutes of ARQASC held on 21 September 2021 at EDCOM 3-12 (21-22).

45.2.   Approved the minutes of PMAP held on 30 September 2021 at EDCOM 3-13 (21-22).

45.3.   Approved the minutes of the Quality Review Sub-Committee (QRSC) held on 7 October 2021 at EDCOM 2-14 (21-22).

46.   Any Other Business

46.1   None.

47.   Dates of Next Meeting

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

- 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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15 February 2022