Education Committee

Confirmed

10 October 2019

Minutes

Present:
Professor Anthony Smith (Chair)
Mr Ian Davis; Mr Ashley Doolan; Dr Julie Evans; Ms Megan Gerrie; Professor Deborah Gill; Ms June Hedges; Dr Arne Hofmann; Dr Sandra Leaton Gray; Mr Zak Liddell; Ms Blathnaid Mahony; Ms Aatikah Malik; Dr Helen Matthews; Mr Jim Onyemenam; Mr Derfel Owen; Professor Norbert Pachler; Dr Jo Pearce; Professor Mike Porter; Professor Aeli Roberts; Mr Mike Rowson; Ms Ashley Slanina-Davies; Dr Hazel Smith; Dr Fiona Strawbridge and Ms Olga Thomas.

In attendance: Professor Stella Bruzzi for Item 6; Ms Joanne Moles for Item 8; Mr Simon To for item 7; Dr Graham Woodgate for Item 6 and Mr Rob Traynor (Acting Secretary for meeting).

Apologies for absence were received from: Ms Wendy Appleby; Dr Simon Banks; Dr Sam Smidt; Professor Eva Sorensen and Ms Lizzie Vinton.

Part I: Preliminary Business

1.   Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership 2019-20

1.1.   Approved – the terms of reference, constitution and membership for Education Committee (EdCom) 2019-20 at EdCom 1-01 (19-20), subject to minor amendments to two members' titles and roles.

1.2.   EdCom welcomed the following new members:

- Ms Megan Gerrie – ex officio in her role as Director, Education Projects and Planning, Office of the Vice-Provost (Education and Student Affairs – OVPESA);
- Dr Jo Pearce – co-opted as Faculty Education Lead (PGT), Institute of Education (IOE);
- Ms Ashley Slanina-Davies – ex officio as the Students' Union (SU) Education Officer;
- Ms Aatikah Malik – ex officio as the SU Welfare and International Officer;

- Mr Jim Onyemenam – ex officio as the SU Postgraduate Students' Officer.

1.3. It was noted that EdCom and all of its sub-committees, with the exception of the Quality Review Sub-Committee (QRSC), had added an additional term of reference to help ensure UCL compliance with the Office for Students (OfS) Regulatory Framework. In EdCom's case this was Condition B6 relating to UCL's participation in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

1.4. Approved – the Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership for the Academic Partnerships Review Group (APRG) 2019-20 at EDCOM 1-02 (19-20).

1.5. Approved – the Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership for the Academic Regulations and Quality Assurance Sub-Committee (ARQASC) 2019-20 at EDCOM 1-03 (19-20).

1.6. Approved – the Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership for the Programme and Module Approval Panels (PMAP) 2019-20 at EDCOM 1-04 (19-20).

1.7. Approved – the Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership for the Quality Review Sub-Committee 2019-20 at EDCOM 1-05 (19-20).

1.8. It was proposed that QRSC amend its term of reference 5a to add interruptions of study to "identifying trends in student recruitment, admission, progression and award data". This will be discussed by QRSC at its next meeting.

Action: QRSC Chair and Secretary

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

2.1. Approved – the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 June 2019 [EdCom Minutes 71-91, 2018-19], subject to minor correction at Minute 73 (amending the Qualifications and Credit Framework for the 2020-21 session, not 2021-22 as stated).

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes

3A Interruption of Study Procedure
[Minute 79, EdCom 11.06.2019]

3A.1 EdCom was informed that it was not possible to implement the Interruption of Study procedure approved at the last meeting, for the 2019-20 session. The student records system was being further developed this year and was not yet able to implement the changes to the process. In the meantime, the Interruption of Study Task Group continued to meet, developing forms and guidance and considering how to encourage faculties and departments to roll out any aspects of the new regulations not reliant on upgrades to the system. The Group was also considering whether any further minor modifications to the new procedure may be required, including arrangements for students on their return to study.

4.   Chair's Action taken since the Last Meeting

4.1.   EdCom noted the late changes to the Academic Manual approved by Chair's action since the previous meeting at EDCOM 1-06 (19-20).

Part II: Matters for Discussion

5.   Deadlines for Changes to the Academic Manual 2020-21

5.1.   Received – the paper at EDCOM 1-07 (19-20) presented by the Director of Academic Services, who outlined the key deadlines for approval of any proposed changes to the regulations and the Academic Manual for 2020-21.

5.2.   EdCom noted that members should view the June 2020 meeting date as the final deadline for approval of any changes. It was further advised that more substantial items should be submitted for the April 2020 meeting, in order to allow enough time for consideration. The paper also included the deadlines for ARQASC to consider the more substantive proposals in time for EdCom's later approval. Members were advised not to regard the reserved meeting in July 2020 as an additional opportunity for approval of changes, as this will only be held if it proves absolutely necessary.

6.   New Qualification Proposal: MASc

6.1.   Received - the paper at EDCOM 1-08 (19-20) presented by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and the Acting Head of the Bachelor of Arts and Science (BASc).

6.2.   Arts and Humanities proposed the creation of a new qualification, the Master of Arts and Science (MASc), following on from the success of the BASc at undergraduate level. This would enable UCL to continue as a pioneer in this area of study and would be the first such qualification in the world. Other internationally renowned universities, such as Harvard, Hong Kong University and Yale, were also planning provision in this area. The MASc would also provide a distinctive postgraduate degree for BASc students to progress to, for which there was substantial interest among the cohort.

6.3.   It was noted that following previous discussions and earlier iterations of the proposed qualification elsewhere in UCL (such as at the Faculty Tutor Forum), the main initial concerns around the MASc had been addressed and EdCom members agreed that it would be a distinctive qualification in its own right, amongst UCL's postgraduate programmes. There was praise for the clear structure outlined in the document, with core modules in interdisciplinary research, scholarships and engagement skills. There was also an interdisciplinary research based dissertation worth 90 credits. It was queried whether this might be too structurally prescriptive, should other departments wish to make use of the MASc title, but the consensus was that this should be retained as it marked out the MASc qualification as clearly distinct from

other Masters qualifications. It was suggested that the core modules and dissertation could be re-phrased as the maximum and minimum thresholds, should other programmes wish to use the qualification.

6.4.   Endorsed – EdCom recommended that Academic Committee approve the creation of the new qualification of MASc.

7.   Student Priorities for Education

7.1.   Received - the paper at EDCOM 1-09 (19-20) presented by the Education Officer and the Leadership Development and Change Manager from the Student's Union. EdCom was asked to consider any further dissemination of the report and recommended practice to improve the student experience and in particular to consider the three recommendations outlined in the report.

7.2.   The following points were raised in the discussion:

a) Recommendation 1: Teaching Rooms and Class Size – this remained a major area of student concern and complaint, with large class sizes and inadequate sized rooms frequently raised by student representatives, although there was some appreciation of UCL's investment into its estate. The report listed a number of urgently required actions to address these concerns. EdCom noted a number of initiatives which might help with this including a Transforming our Professional Services (TOPS) practice group from across UCL focussing on timetabling, which was considering more effective use of space and how the teaching week could be better utilised to free more time. It was suggested that more accessible and accurate data on student numbers on modules would be helpful as it was difficult to access this on the CMS system and this often led to an underestimation of actual numbers in the lecture theatre. Further work on these systems was required and an institutional approach would be needed to producing this data. It was also noted that the report would be helpful for Library and Estates in setting priority areas which could more urgently be addressed.

b) Recommendation 2: Specific Student Groups – concerns were reported that part-time students often felt over-looked and neglected in terms of the support they received and in comparison to their full-time peers. The report recommended that this be reviewed. PGR students also continued to raise concerns, particularly with their teaching space, which the SU was taking this forward with the Doctoral School and for discussion at the Research Degrees Committee. It was further noted that some comments in the report alluded to inconsistency in the number of study hours students engaged with in their programmes across UCL. For some programmes this appeared to be excessive with students spending ten to twelve hours per day on academic work and sometimes asked to work at weekends. This was some way in advance of the ten hours per credit outlined in the Credit Framework in the Academic Manual and it was suggested that greater guidance on student work-loads was required to ensure all programmes were aware of this.

c) Recommendation 3: Assessment Preparation – dissatisfaction with the clarity of assessment criteria appeared to be the main concern raised by the SSCCs, which surprised some EdCom members as this area had received considerable focus in recent years. UCL had also made stringent efforts to address poor student feedback on assessment and feedback of work. It was suggested that this was an area that should be more easily fixed than other aspects of assessment practice, such as returning marked work, which could be affected by large student numbers. It was suggested that good practice identified in programmes should be more easily disseminated across UCL and that programmes should also be asked to scrutinise more generic assessment criteria and judge whether this was always applicable to the assessment to be undertaken, taking student feedback on board.

d) EdCom discussed further dissemination of the report and suggested that it should be received by Faculty Teaching Committees (FTC - though some had already discussed it), Departmental Teaching Committees (DTCs) and faculty Management Advisory Groups faculties or equivalent bodies. Faculties might also wish to work with their Faculty Student Representatives to focus on the three main recommendations highlighted in the report. It was further suggested that it would be useful to map the issues raised in the report with the Education Strategy, focussing on action taken to address these issues.

e) EdCom thanked the Students' Union for the helpful and thorough Students Priorities for Education report.

7.3.   Agreed – that EdCom note the key recommendations outlined in the Students Priorities for Education report and align with its programme of work for the session. EdCom members to note the above discussion on further dissemination of the report and circulate widely as appropriate to faculties and departments.

Action: EdCom Chair, Secretary and Members to note

8.   Examinations Report 2018-19

8.1.   Received - the paper at EDCOM 1-10 (19-20) presented by the Examinations Manager, Academic Services, who noted the following points:

a) This was the second year that the main examinations were held at the Excel Centre and students appeared to be more used to the East London location and had overcome the cultural shift to moving there which was apparent in some feedback from the previous year. There was a good working relationship with the Excel Centre which created a better experience for students, alongside the no announcement rule on exam paper errors which had reduced interruptions. There was less complaints and reports of material irregularities this year.

b) The Exams Operation Group, comprising of multiple stakeholders from across UCL, had facilitated closer working between key departments and services. Systems had become more efficient and effective, helped by the revised process for online submission of exam papers from departments, moving the collection of exam timetable data onto Portico and the further integration of timetabling software. This was coupled with improved liaison with departments on the

submission of papers, checking the draft timetable and using the new exams incident log to communicate more speedily on issues raised during the examination period.

c) The eligibility for students to take exams overseas had been reduced from 500 in 2018 to 114 this year and this helped to ensure UCL's academic standards and eliminate some problems which had been notified at some of the overseas venues in the previous year. The changes were explained to students in advance with a clear rationale and few concerns were received from students as a result.

d) The anticipated reduction in the number of Late Summer Assessments (LSA) did not occur, with a small increase recorded on 2019. There was also an increase in examination adjustments (7700) with more students requiring alternative arrangements to the Excel for taking their exams, typically at the Bloomsbury campus. This was a marked 100% increase over the last two years and required much work with departments and Student Support and Wellbeing (SSW) in supporting the students.

e) A total of almost 92,000 examination candidatures were processed by the Examinations Office, with around 4,500 exam papers spread over 81 sessions.

f) Plans to further improve the examination provision in 2020-21 and beyond included work to continue the contract with the Excel Centre for its use as the main UCL examination venue in the coming sessions, the procurement of a new exams timetabling system to bring more efficiency to the process and working with departments to further reduce exam paper errata. There would also be work around the clarity of deadlines for exam processes and ensuring that departments were more aware of the consequences of late module registrations missing them (for example, this severely limited the ability to avoid clashes or to adjust the student load).

8.2. The following points were raised in the discussion:

a) It was suggested that the anticipated decrease in LSAs had not occurred due to the overall changes to the examination process which would require considerable adjustments by programmes and departments as they became used to the new processes. There had also been re-structured and improved welfare provision at UCL, with students more aware of the help and support on offer, including exam adjustments, which may have led to an increase in take-up by students. This would require careful monitoring by the Exams Operation Group. It was noted that it was good practice for programmes to prepare for LSAs by producing exam content at the same time as for the main exam period and liaising with their external examiners.

b) It was queried whether there had been any demand by students for using computers etc in exams to allow students to type their answers rather the traditional hand written papers. The Exams team had not received many requests for this, but it was noted that this would require very careful consideration should it be introduced. There was some anecdotal evidence that some institutions which had experimented with typed exams had received student complaints that they preferred hand-written answers to the papers.

c) It was suggested that consideration be given to improving the incident reporting systems for students taken ill during examinations or not arriving on the day. Although the system appeared to work quite well for students taking their home department exams, it was slower for those taking modules outside their department and there were often delays in the home exam boards being informed.

d) It was suggested that a concerted efforts should continue to encourage departments to take greater care in producing exam papers, to reduce the number of errors. This often led to student complaints and many errors could be avoided by more careful checking processes in departments.

e) The discussion also focussed on ways to deal with the sheer volume of examinations now taking place at UCL, which created strains on the students, departments and professional services delivering the exams. One suggestion was to introduce a winter exam period to spread the load throughout the session, though it was noted that holding fewer exams would have a more substantial effect. An assessment review was currently underway which would look at these issues and encourage consideration by programmes to use a greater variety of assessments as alternatives to holding exams. Departments should also consider reduction of exams which ended on the half hour and proved to be very disruptive to students taking longer exams at the Excel Centre. It was suggested that the Faculty Tutor Forum could explore initial discussions on these ideas.

8.3. The Chair thanked the Examinations Manager and her team for all their hard work on successfully delivering the highly complex and voluminous examination provision for UCL.

9. Statistical Reporting for Exam Boards

9.1. Approved - the paper at EDCOM 1-11 (19-20) presented by the Director of Academic Services.

9.2. During the last session, EdCom had approved a standard set of examination board reports for confirming progression and classification outcomes. In order to enable departments to focus on these changes and other developments of the Academic Model Project (AMP), it was agreed to adopt a lighter approach for statistical reporting at exam boards for the previous session and to explore these matters in more detail in 2019-20.

9.3. A review was undertaken of external examiners views on the requirements for statistical reporting at the boards, which elicited a wide response from over 150 external examiners and the identification of key areas to focus on. The responses indicated that there were two main purposes for statistical analysis required:

- Data to support initial data entry checks and moderation prior to the actual board meeting (e.g. comparison between components and/or modules in the current session to identify outliers);

- Analysis of performance trends to provide assurance to the board on standards or inform future changes in assessment methods or regulations (e.g. analysis of performance in a module across multiple years, analysis of trends in classification outcomes).

9.4.   Agreed – that a working group be established to:

    i.   Consult the wider academic community and prioritize the requirements identified for (a) initial data checking and moderation; and (b) longer-term trend analysis;
    ii.   Advise on report design; and
    iii.   Develop guidance for Boards.

The Director of Academic Services would canvass for members of the working group, to include faculty and departmental exam board chairs.

Action: Dr Helen Matthews

10.   Regulatory Issues from the New Exam Board Process

10.1.   Received - the paper at EDCOM 1-12 (19-20) presented by the Director of Academic Services.

10.2.   The Director of Academic Services noted that the new Exam Boards process introduced in summer 2019 had been a positive development overall, allowing a systems based process to validate degree outcomes and help ease the work for the Exam Boards. However, the new system had also revealed a number of cases where programmes had not been delivered correctly and in accordance with the UCL regulations. Suspensions of regulations or the taking of missing credits in subsequent years was often used to address this. This included cases with incorrect credit levels where students took modules at a higher or lower level than their programme should have allowed and cases with incorrect credit volume where students took insufficient credits for the award of their degrees. There were also issues with late mark changes notified after exam boards or after results were released to students, which often led to further problems with LSAs. A significant problem here was Extenuating Circumstances (EC) decisions being missed from the mark calculations and having to be re-calculated once the error had come to, sometimes by the student themselves. The report outlined all the problems in detail with suggestions for actions to address them to prevent, or at least reduce, their re-occurrence for this session.

10.3.   EdCom noted that a root cause of some of the problems was incorrect programme diets on the student records system which did not reflect how the programme worked in practice. Academic Services would work with faculties and departments to improve the accuracy of the programme diets and better support module selection. It was suggested that in some cases students were allowed to select lower level modules to address skills gaps or access more basic information, but if not carefully monitored, might end up taking too many of such modules and not then be able to meet the

award credit threshold. It was important that the system was able to identify more quickly such issues before or just after module selection, rather than at the end of the year, or in a few cases, the end of the programme. It was noted that Phase 4 of the Academic Model Project would address some of these issues by supporting greater data checking before progression and award calculation and plans for an online EC process, to update the system automatically once decisions were made.

10.4.   Endorsed – the measures in the report identified to help address the regulatory issues identified.

Action: Dr Helen Matthews

Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

11.   UCL 2034 Principal Theme 2 (UCL Education Strategy): Annual Report to Council 2018-19

11.1.   Received - the paper at EDCOM 1-13 (19-20) presented by the Chair.

11.2.   The annual report outlined the key work and achievements undertaken on the Education Strategy, comprising Theme 2 of the UCL 2034 Strategy. The report noted positive and significant developments at UCL such as the opening of the new Student Centre and the notable accomplishment of the improvement of UCL's National Student Survey (NSS) scores across all categories, the first time this had been achieved by the institution. The Chair thanked colleagues across UCL for their hard work and dedication to students in helping this happen.

11.3.   The report also noted the work still to be undertaken to make further improvements and this was broken down in the report by the eight objectives of the education strategy. Further work would also include mapping the strategy to priorities identified by the Student's Union and identifying any gaps in provision. It was suggested that one area of focus might be to improve the response rates to UCL's internal student satisfaction surveys, in particular the Student Experience Survey, which acted as a pre-cursor for penultimate year undergraduate students to the NSS.

11.4.   EdCom noted that the annual report will also be submitted to forthcoming meetings of Council and Academic Board in October 2019.

12.   EdCom Annual Report to Academic Committee

12.1.   Approved - the paper at EDCOM 1-14 (19-20) presented by the Policy Advisor (Education Governance), Academic Services.

12.2.   The annual report summarised the main activities undertaken by the Committee in the previous session, with the activities separated thematically into sections outlining areas such as learning and teaching, the student voice and the student experience. This included key EdCom discussions on the TEF, reports on the UCL examination

process and the organisation of student representatives. A further section summarised EdCom's important discussions in improving the academic regulations, noting its approval of revised chapters in the Academic Manual. A further section and related annexes also outlined the key work of EdCom's sub-committees.

12.3.   EdCom noted that the report was important in conveying the Committee's role in helping to improve UCL's academic provision, with a key motive of doing so to help improve the student experience at UCL. The report would next be submitted to Academic Committee, where it will be presented by the Chair.

13.   Annual Summary of Minutes of Faculty Teaching Committees

13.1.   Approved - the paper at EDCOM 1-15 (19-20) presented by the Policy Advisor (Education Governance), Academic Services.

13.2.   The report presented the annual analysis of the main matters discussed at FTCs. It was noted that the committees continued to operate well and generally met their terms of reference, providing a space for strategic discussion of education matters for the faculties and their departments.

14.   Academic Partnerships Memoranda of Agreement – Update

14.1.   Received - the paper at EDCOM 1-16 (19-20).

14.2.   It was noted that EdCom had re-confirmed in April 2019 its decision that where there were no APRG-approved and fully signed Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) in place for an academic partnership on 1 September each year, the recruitment of the next intake to that programme or (non-compulsory) module would be suspended until the MoA was fully signed. This was now included in the Academic Partnerships Framework in the Academic Manual for 2019-20.

14.3.   The paper outlined the current status of the UCL academic partnerships and showed where MoAs still needed to be agreed, noting a number of programmes where recruitment had been suspended. The report also summarised the steps being taken to address these issues.

15.   Approval of Academic Partnerships

15.1.   Approved - the academic partnerships recommended by the APRG paper at EDCOM 1-17 (19-20).

16.   Approval of New Programmes of Study

16.1.   Approved - the programmes of study recommended by PMAP at EDCOM 1-18 (19-20).

17. Minutes of Sub-Committees and Working Groups

17.1. Approved the minutes of APRG held on 15 November 2018 at EDCOM 1-19.

17.2. Approved the minutes of ARQASC held on 25 March 2019 at EDCOM 1-20.

17.3. Approved the minutes of ARQASC held on 14 May 2019 at EDCOM 1-21.

17.4. Approved the minutes of ARQASC held on 13 June 2019 at EDCOM 1-22.

17.5. Approved the minutes of PMAP held on 16 May 2019 at EDCOM 1-23.

17.6. Approved the minutes of PMAP held on 13 June 2019 at EDCOM 1-24.

17.7. Approved the minutes of PMAP held on 11 July 2019 at EDCOM 1-25.

17.8. Approved the minutes of QRSC held on 11 April 2019 at EDCOM 1-26.

17.9. Approved the minutes of QRSC held on 6 June 2019 at EDCOM 1-27.

18. Suspensions of Regulations

18.1. Approved – the Suspensions of Regulations at EDCOM 1-28 (19-20).

19. Any Other Business – Examination Mitigation for Industrial Action

19.1. EdCom noted that the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) had found against UCL in its handling of some of the student complaints arising from the industrial action in the pension dispute in 2018. The OIA had ruled that UCL had provided insufficient guidance to students impacted by the strikes. It was further noted that the University and College Union were currently balloting their members regarding pensions and pay and there was the possibility of further industrial action this session.

19.2. Agreed – to re-activate the EdCom sub-group on Strike Mitigation should the industrial action go ahead.

Action: EdCom Chair, Secretary and Members to note

20. Dates of Next Meeting

20.1. The dates of the EdCom meetings for the rest of the 2019-20 session are:

- Tuesday 3 December 2019 10.30am (Room 114 Foster Court)
- Tuesday 25 February 2020 10.30am (Room 1.20 Malet Place Engineering Building)
- Thursday 30 April 2020 10.30am (Room B.05 Darwin Building)

- Monday 8 June 2020 10.30am (Room B.05 Darwin Building)
- RESERVED MEETING Thursday 16 July 2020 10.30am (Room B.05 Darwin Building)

Rob Traynor (for Lizzie Vinton)
Acting Secretary to EdCom for the meeting

Policy Adviser (Education Governance)
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12 November 2019