Education Committee

14 October 2021

Confirmed Minutes

Present:
Professor Norbert Pachler (Chair for the meeting)
Dr Ali Abolfathi; Ms Arifa Aminy; Professor Simon Banks; Professor Clare Brooks; Mr Ian Davis; Professor Sally Day; Mr Ashley Doolan; Dr Jo Fraser-Pearce; Ms June Hedges; Professor Arne Hofmann; Professor Jane Holder; Dr Rachael King; Mr Zak Liddell; Ms Blathnaid Mahony; Ms Viktoria Makai; Dr Elvira Mambetisaeva; Professor Chloe Marshall; Dr Helen Matthews; Professor Paola Pedarzani; Mr Derfel Owen; Professor Aeli Roberts; Dr Bill Sillar; Professor Sam Smidt; Professor Olga Thomas; Ms Lizzie Vinton and Dr Stan Zochowski.

In attendance: Ms Joanne Moles and Professor Simon Walker (for Minute 9); Mr Darren Payne (for Minute 8); Ms Leigh Kilpert (for Mr Mike Rowson); Mr Clive Young (for Dr Fiona Strawbridge); Ms Alison Edridge (Secretary) and Mr Rob Traynor (Assistant Secretary).

Apologies for absence were received from: Professor Deborah Gill; Dr Nicole Brown; Mr Ian Davis; Dr Julie Evans; Professor Alistair Greig; Dr Joana Jacob Ramalho; Mr Mike Rowson, Dr Hazel Smith and Dr Fiona Strawbridge.

Part I: Preliminary Business

1. Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership 2021-22

1.1. Approved – the terms of reference, constitution and membership for Education Committee (EdCom) 2021-22 at EdCom 1-01 (21-22).

1.2. EdCom welcomed the following new members:

- Ms Arifa Aminy – ex officio as the Students' Union (SU) Equity Officer;
- Ms Viktoria Makai – ex officio as the SU Postgraduate Officer;
- Ms Alison Edridge, new EdCom Secretary.

Mr Ayman Benmati continued as ex officio SU Education Officer.

1.3. The Chair thanked the former Registrar, Ms Wendy Appleby for her excellent service and support for the Committee. Ms Appleby had left UCL for a new position at Southampton University and was replaced by the Interim Registrar, Mr Derfel Owen.

1.4. Approved – the Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership for the Academic Partnerships Review Group (APRG) 2021-22 at EDCOM 1-02 (21-22).

1.5. Approved – the Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership for the Academic Regulations and Quality Assurance Sub-Committee (ARQASC) 2021-22 at EDCOM 1-03 (21-22).

1.6. Approved – the Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership for the Programme and Module Approval Panels (PMAP) 2021-22 at EDCOM 1-04 (21-22).

1.7. Approved – the Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership for the Quality Review Sub-Committee (QRSC) 2021-22 at EDCOM 1-05 (21-22).

1.8. Approved – the Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership for the Degree Apprenticeships Steering Group (DASG) 2021-22 at EDCOM 1-06 (21-22).

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

2.1. Approved – the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 July 2021 [EdCom Minutes 88-95, 2020-21] at EDCOM 1-07 (21-22).

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes

3A Proposal for Task Group to Review Affiliate Programmes
[Minute 92, EdCom 22.07.2021]

3A.1 EdCom had agreed to establish a Task Group to review affiliate programmes at its last meeting. It was noted that whilst the Group had not yet formally met, preliminary discussions between the chairs and the Study Abroad Team, as well as a data gathering exercise were taking place. The Group intended to report to EdCom for its February 2022 meeting.

4. Chair's Action taken since the Last Meeting

4A Exam Board Mitigation for External Examiners' Non-Attendance (Institute of Education - IOE)

4A.1 Received – the paper at EDCOM 1-08 (21-22) which outlined Chair's Action taken to approve the mitigation taken by the PGCE Primary Care (IOE) Boards of Examiners (BoE) for non-attendance by an external examiner, following UCL regulations (Academic Manual Chapter 4). The Chair was satisfied that the action taken to

replace the external examiner, including identification of other external examiners to provide cover, was appropriate and in line with the UCL procedures.

5.   Deadlines for Changes to the Academic Manual 2022-23

5.1.   Received – the paper at EDCOM 1-09 (21-22) presented by the Academic Regulations Manager, Academic Services, who outlined the key deadlines for EdCom approval of any proposed changes to the regulations and the Academic Manual for 2022-23. EdCom was asked to note the deadlines and timelines, to be borne in mind when developing policy.

5.2.   EdCom members should view the June 2022 meeting date as the final deadline for approval of any changes, with regulations only submitted to this meeting once in their final form. The July 2022 reserved meeting would only be held in the event of serious unforeseen circumstances. A staff guide to developing policies and regulations for the Academic Manual, including deadlines, approval requirements and templates was available on the [Academic Manual About](#) page.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

6.   Education and Student Experience Governance

6.1.   Noted - the paper at EDCOM 1-10 (21-22).

6.2.   The paper, which proposed some changes to EdCom, its sub-committees and wider reporting arrangements, required further discussion before formal consideration at the Committee. EdCom also noted the suggestion that EdCom's relationship to Academic Board would require greater clarity in the paper, particularly in the organogram showing EdCom's relationship to the wider UCL committees.

7.   Degree Outcomes Data

7.1.   Received - the paper at EDCOM 1-11 (21-22) presented by the Academic Regulations Manager. The paper noted an increase in the award of First and Upper Second class degrees. Student Records had conducted initial analysis of the data, though some outstanding awards were still to be made. It suggested that there were other factors that had contributed to the increase in the proportion of First class degrees and that the increase was not solely as a result of the No Detriment classification rules. Further analysis was required as this was a complex issue and difficult to attribute to a single cause.

7.2.   The report outlined possible contributory factors, noting attainment had risen across the whole sector in recent years. It was noted, however, that UCL had been awarding a relatively high proportion of Firsts within the sector for a number of years. UCL's 2019-20 package of No Detriment measures included classifications being based on

the best 50% of 2019/20 credits, or excluding 2019/20 credits entirely from the classification. This appeared to have the greatest effect on the number of Firsts, but did not fully explain the increase. Analysis of the classification borderline extension by 1% for students graduating in 2020-21, showed no significant effect. However, improvement in module marks clustered around the Upper Second/First borderline, appeared to be a factor in the increased number of Firsts awarded. It was also possible that the changes in assessment practice may have been a factor, which allowed students more time to produce work, as well as reducing exam pressure.

7.3.   It was noted that the reliable module mark data for 2017 was not available, owing to the change to the academic model on modules but data for other years still showed an increase in First class marks. EdCom noted that external scrutiny with regards to grade inflation was also increasing, which added further impetus to understand and address this issue.

7.4.   The paper showed a breakdown of the data by faculty. While it was not intended for comparative purposes, it showed a difference of around 30 percentage points between the highest and lowest proportion of Firsts awarded at Faculty level. It was noted that some subjects required higher levels of qualifications at intake, but awarded a lower proportion of Firsts. It was suggested that it was important to identify the reasons for these differences and to also recognise that the purpose of First class awards was to distinguish truly excellent students. Consideration should be given to marking culture and differences between disciplines (e.g. some used full range of marks whilst others saw 80% as an upper limit for excellence). It was also suggested that it could be beneficial to re-look at the condonable range and the amount of failure which students might be able to carry.

7.5.   It was further suggested that more guidance was required on the distribution of marks and clarity on the acceptable parameters that departments should aim for. It was important to define the number of Firsts and Upper Seconds that UCL should award and to clearly articulate the problems which might prevent this. This should involve comparison with the sector including Russell Group universities, as well as institutions with lower qualification intakes.

7.6.   Student representatives noted that many students had appreciated the assessment changes implemented as a result of the pandemic as students had more time to study and work on their assessments. International students and other students (including BAME students, disabled students, those with caring responsibilities and many others) were appreciative of working from home and having more time to complete assessments. Some considered this better for their mental health. It was suggested that additional support could be provided to aid international students' understanding of the approach to teaching and assessment within the UK compared to that in their home country. This might help address possible issues with plagiarism and academic misconduct arising from language barriers and different education

cultures. It was further suggested that the student feedback obtained during the development of the Teaching Operating Model also be factored into discussions.

7.7. The Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) awarding gap had reduced as a result of the No Detriment Policies and changes to assessment types. It would be important to identify how the design of assessments could enable all students to demonstrate their achievements, regardless of background.

7.8. EdCom noted that UCL was now in a stronger position to deal with the issue of grade inflation after the introduction of harmonised processes and clear definitions on borderlines. Once UCL had defined what its degree classifications profile should look like, consideration should be given to the framework and support required to achieve this.

7.9. **Agreed:** that ARQASC further consider the issue of the increasing number of Firsts awarded, taking note of the EdCom discussion. Proposals to address this should then be submitted to a future EdCom meeting for consideration.
Action: Chair and Secretary of ARQASC

8. UCL Academic Misconduct Panel Annual Report 2020-21

8.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 1-12 (21-22) presented by the Policy Advisor (Regulations & Quality Assurance), Academic Services and Secretary to UCL's Academic Misconduct Panel.

8.2. The report provided an analysis of student academic misconduct cases in 2021-22 and a comparison to previous years, identifying the trends and responses in UCL casework and sector developments. The report also summarised UCL's response to the rise in academic misconduct cases, including proposals endorsed by EdCom and its sub-committees and some additional suggestions to continue this work. The Chair thanked the Policy Advisor (Regulations and Quality Assurance) and the other colleagues involved in the panels for their hard work in what had been a difficult year.

8.3. The move to an online assessment environment appeared to have led to a large increase in academic misconduct cases in 2020-21. Although exam offences (1 case) and plagiarism (54 cases) had decreased from the previous session, collusion (57 cases) and contract cheating (42 cases) had seen significant and concerning expansion. The latter had led to 31 student expulsions from UCL as the severest penalty was required to deal with proven cases.

8.4. Contract cheating was a sector-wide problem recognised by the Office for Students (OfS) and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). It was reported that the UK now had 930 essay mills and that a private Member's Bill was underway in parliament which proposed to make them illegal. It was noted that this problem may be widely under-estimated by the sector, with recent research indicating that as many

as one in seven students had engaged in misconduct in the last two decades. Many UCL cases had used the same website from a company based in the USA.

8.5. The report also outlined measures for improvements to the Assessment Operating Model which it was hoped would reduce collusion and contract cheating. This included less use of 24-hour timed exams in favour of controlled condition exams, which should reduce the opportunity for students to engage in misconduct. In addition, the expedited academic misconduct procedures introduced last year in response to the pandemic, were positively received by departments and EdCom was asked to endorse their continuation for 2021-22.
Agreed: that the expedited academic misconduct arrangements introduced in 2020-21 should continue for this year, with a view to making them permanent in future.
Action: Academic Regulations Manager and Policy Advisor (Regulations and Governance) to note

8.6. The report was positively received by EdCom members though the large increase in severe penalties last session had revealed some problems in communications between students' home department and teaching departments. When the misconduct took place in the teaching department, students' home departments often did not find out until the final decision was made. UCL had a duty of care when excluding students and it was important for home departments to be able to provide support to them during this process. It was suggested that a formalised institutional process was created, with input from Student Support and Wellbeing and UCL Careers, to support such students.

8.7. It was proposed that an information campaign was launched for this year's students to discourage cheating and highlight the often severe penalties for doing so. It would be useful to use anonymised case studies from the 2020-21 casework. However, further thought was required to address the problems with English language identified in the paper, where it was noted that some students had difficulties engaging with the Academic Misconduct Panels.
Agreed: that the Policy Advisor (Regulations & Quality Assurance) and the Faculty Tutor for Engineering liaise with department and professional services colleagues as necessary to consider the support necessary for students receiving academic misconduct penalties and to further consider the information campaign to discourage students from engaging in such activities.
Action: Policy Advisor (Regulations and Quality Assurance) and Faculty Tutor (Engineering)

9.   Assessment Operating Model 2021-22

9.1. Received – the papers at EDCOM 1-13 (21-22) presented by the Academic Regulations Manager, the Assessment Lead (UCL Arena) and the Head of Assessment Delivery and Platforms. The papers outlined a report from the Online

Assessment Regulations Sub-Group of ARQASC which had convened over the summer to review the regulations supporting online assessments.

9.2. The Sub-Group was chaired by the Assessment Lead (UCL Arena) and consisted of colleagues from Academic Board, faculties, students and the SU and professional services. It was noted that the bold steps taken by UCL last year for online assessment were critical to the success of delivering assessment remotely and that institutions which had not followed a similar course of action had suffered reputational damage, with some now approaching UCL for advice. The AssessmentUCL platform had helped to modernise UCL provision and, using findings from the evaluation, staff and students were generally happy with progress. It was noted that feedback from staff was received in relation to the marking process and this was being taken forward with the supplier to work on enhancements. The work on enhancing the marker's journey was given the highest priority but noted that the timeline may not deliver enhancements in time for immediate assessment delivery.

9.3. The paper asked EdCom to approve proposals for a new set of regulations for 2021/22, including:

- Assessment Operating Model (staff-facing) and accompanying matrix.
- Student-facing regulations for each type of assessment (including key operational information and explanations of key terms, to respond to student requests for a single information point).
- New Self-Certification Policy.
- Revised Student Academic Misconduct Procedure.

9.4. The academic impact statement included in the paper was welcomed by members. However, a query was raised regarding the self-certification policy, as it stated that a third self-certification opportunity would be available to students with "teaching *in* Term 3". It was noted that this should read "teaching *after* Term 3" as stated in the draft regulations. This was intended where academic activity extended beyond the end of Term 3 and did not specifically refer to classroom teaching.

9.5. It was queried whether it would be possible to move back to in-person examinations for 2021/22 as students had largely returned to campus. It was noted that there were significant logistical factors involved, with 95,000 candidacies at UCL and venue hire meant that exams needed to be planned two years ahead. At the time the decision was made on the Teaching Operating Model for 21-22 the climate was, and still is uncertain in relation to covid restrictions. This, therefore, had informed the decision to hold the 2021-22 UCL centrally organised exams online. However, there was some leeway for in-person examinations to be held by individual departments where approval had been given (e.g. MBBS years 4 and 5). EdCom was informed that universities that switched between plans to hold in-person exams and then were forced to hold them online engendered significant student dissatisfaction. The current climate with Covid was still very uncertain. UCL had placed itself in a position of certainty by making decisions early so that students fully understood the position is in

relation to in-person examinations. To pivot back and forth was not viewed as a viable option for student satisfaction.

9.6. The report was viewed favourably by EdCom overall and the Chair thanked the ARQASC sub-group and people involved for their hard work. It was suggested that the papers would help faculties to communicate with departments on the new regulations. Webpages were being set up to disseminate the information.

9.7. **Approved:** the papers at EDCOM 1-13 (21-22), including the following:

- Assessment Operating Model and Assessment Operating Matrix 2021-22
- Student Regulations 2021-22
- Self-Certification Policy 2021-22
- Student Academic Misconduct Procedure 2021-22

Action: Academic Regulations Manager, Assessment Lead (UCL Arena) and Head of Assessment Delivery and Platforms to oversee implementation of the policies.

10. EdCom Annual Report to Academic Committee

10.1. Approved - the paper at EDCOM 1-14 (22-22) presented by the Assistant Secretary.

10.2. The annual report summarised EdCom's main activities in the previous session, separated thematically into sections outlining key areas such as learning, teaching and assessment, the student experience, changes to academic regulations and the work of EdCom's sub-committees. The report was longer this year due to the three additional meetings held in 2020-21 to consider assessment mitigation in response to the pandemic and the teaching operating model. It was important to capture this activity to fully inform Academic Committee and Academic Board of the work undertaken by the Committee.

10.3. EdCom was informed, in relation to Section 6.3 UCL Student Attendance Policy in the report, that problems had arisen regarding the attendance infrastructure with "RegisterUCL". The new student attendance recording system for UG and PGT students was not working properly or was not available in some rooms. The system was meant to notify departments of non-attendance and trigger support letters to students. There was also some confusion with the policy and departments were unsure how to monitor attendance, particularly for approved absences and Tier 4 attendance monitoring. It was suggested that although UCL no longer had the 70% attendance requirement, the policy might require greater clarity.
Agreed: that the Secretary raise this matter with Student and Registry Services colleagues and report back to EdCom.
Action: Secretary

Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

11.   Approval of New Programmes of Study

11.1.   Approved - the programmes of study recommended by PMAP at EDCOM 1-15 (21-22).

12.   Minutes of Sub-Committees and Working Groups

12.1.   Approved the minutes of ARQASC held on 24 May 2021 at EDCOM 1-16 (21-22).

12.2.   Approved the minutes of PMAP held on 8 July 2021 at EDCOM 1-17 (21-22).

12.3.   Approved the minutes of QRSC held on 26 January 2021 at EDCOM 1-18 (21-22).

12.4.   Approved the minutes of QRSC held on 23 April 2021 at EDCOM 1-19 (21-22).

13.   Any Other Business

13A   Problems with Unitu

13A.1 EdCom was informed of problems with Unitu, the UCL preferred online tool for feedback and the student voice. Integration with the student records system, SITS, had not gone to plan, with many students reporting that they had not been enrolled onto the system or had access to it. This was preventing students from providing feedback as well as delaying student representative elections.
Agreed: that the Registrar check with ISD colleagues and provide EdCom with an update.
Action: The Registrar

14.   Dates of Next Meeting

14.1.   The dates of the EdCom meetings for the rest of the 2021-22 session are:

- Tuesday, 7 December 2021, 14:00 - 16:30
- 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.

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

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28 October 2021