Education Committee

22 July 2021

Confirmed Minutes

Present:
Professor Deborah Gill (Chair)

Dr Ali Abolfathi, Ms Wendy Appleby, Dr Simon Banks; Mr Ayman Benmati; Ms Yasmeen Daoud; Mr Ian Davis; Professor Sally Day; Mr Ashley Doolan; Dr Julie Evans; Dr Jo Fraser-Pearce, Professor Alistair Greig; Ms June Hedges; Professor Arne Hofmann; Professor Jane Holder; Dr Joana Jacob Ramalho; Dr Rachel King; Mr Zak Liddell; Ms Blathnaid Mahony; Ms Viktoria Makai; Dr Elvira Mambetisaeva; Professor Chloe Marshall; Dr Helen Matthews; Mr Derfel Owen, 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: Mr Steve Rowett (for Dr Fiona Strawbridge), Mr Dan Derricott (Secretary) and Mr Rob Traynor (Assistant Secretary)

Apologies for absence were received from: Dr Fiona Strawbridge

Part I: Preliminary Business

88.   Minutes of the Previous Meeting

88.1.   Approved – the Minutes of the previous EdCom meeting held on:

-    10 June 2021 [EdCom Minutes 69-87, 2020-21] at EDCOM 6-01 (20-21).

89.   Matters Arising from the Minutes

89A   Teaching Operation Model Update
   [EdCom Minute 70A, 10.06.21]

89A.1   The Chair provided EdCom with an update on the Teaching Operating Model and Teaching Operating Model and plans for the wider re-opening of UCL in the next session. Although the plans to re-open UCL were still in place, the scenarios they were based on had not anticipated the recent large increases nationally in COVID 19

cases. It was still intended that UCL operate as a campus-based university, though modelling of possible mitigations was underway for overseas students, who might be unable to travel to the UK for the start of term. It was noted that other London universities currently intended to adopt similar approaches.

89A.2 Numerous concerns had been received from students, understandably seeking greater clarity on the arrangements for the start of term and some overseas students had already requested remote learning. Communications were planned to respond to the concerns and provide reassurance to students. However, given the major implications for the institution should international students be unable to join their programmes, an institutional decision was required and it was important to focus on the quality of the educational provision delivered. At senior UCL level, the Education and Operations Delivery Group was meeting frequently to plan the supporting infrastructure required for the return to campus, including testing and vaccination provision for students and staff.

89A.3 During the discussion concerns were aired on the requirement for some programmes to prepare additional online teaching provision for the first term as a contingency, whilst other programmes were not. This was considered inequitable by some staff. It was suggested that careful explanation of the rationale was made clearer to staff (i.e. the identification from the modelling of more vulnerable programmes to students staying away, often those with high overseas student numbers). Linked to this were concerns for staff well-being, with some staff who had had limited opportunities to take vacations since the start of the pandemic now being asked to undertake extra work. Staff would be marking Late Summer Assessments (LSA), exam boards and preparing for induction concurrently and it might not be feasible for some programmes to implement decisions to provide additional online materials. Timely decision-making would provide more time for implementation and relieve some of the pressure on staff.

89A.4 A number of members also reported high numbers of queries from Chinese students concerned with the rising COVID 19 cases in the UK and the government's easing of restrictions, particularly the relaxing of mask wearing rules and social distancing. Many were asking if they could study remotely from China. The Students' Union (SU) also reported conflicting views from students. Many wished to come to UCL as planned, but others were anxious about travelling to the UK and the quarantine laws on arrival. Some students also reported feeling confused by differing advice from departments. It was suggested that centralised communications would be helpful, providing a clear institutional message and rationale for the decisions taken.

89A.5   Another concern raised was the difficulty in navigating between the instruction to maintain a high level of confidentiality in considering the programme mitigations required, whilst simultaneously being asked to keep students informed of the plans for the coming year. It would be difficult to manage this and enable a level of transparency whilst students sought answers from departments. It was recognised that this would be a difficult balance to maintain.

89A.6   It was noted that there was no ideal model that would satisfy everybody. There were stark and strongly held views amongst students on whether teaching should be delivered face to face on campus or online. Hence, it was important to aim for the best outcome, whilst recognising that not everyone's wishes or needs could be satisfied. It would be crucial that people understood the rationale and thinking behind the decisions made. The need for programmes and departments to be able to plan was also recognised. The Senior Management Team (SMT) was discussing this now and it was hoped that an early decision would be made soon. EdCom would be kept informed of the outcome.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

90.   Education Governance at UCL

90.1.   Received: the paper at EDCOM 6-02 (20-21), introduced by the Secretary, which outlined how EdCom might fit into the new academic governance structures currently being considered at a high level in UCL, following discussions at Academic Board (AB), Academic Committee (AC) and the new Provost.

90.2.   The paper proposed an initial position for EdCom and other education-related committees, agreed at a meeting on 1 July of colleagues with joint membership of EdCom and AB. The views of the wider EdCom membership were now sought to refine and recommend this position and to request that the University Management Committee (UMC) and/or SMT take note of it in their wider deliberations on the overall governance structures of UCL.

90.3.   Members broadly welcomed the paper and supported its proposals, such as re-designating the Student Experience Committee (StEC) and the Student Recruitment, Admissions and Funding Committee (StRAFC) as sub-committees of EdCom. It would also be important to ensure that the student experience was not lost in the new governance structure and suggested that EdCom was re-named the "Education and Student Experience Committee".

90.4.   It was suggested that the relationship and reporting lines between EdCom and the more senior bodies was made clearer in the paper and the organogram. For instance to make it clear that EdCom received delegated authority for decision-making from AB. This could extend to the EdCom paper template, to outline which delegated power was being used in a given proposal.

90.5. It was noted that the discussions on the future of AC were still ongoing, though it was likely to remain broadly similar to its current role. It may focus on higher matters of oversight, such as compliance with Office for Students (OfS) conditions of registration, leaving EdCom to focus on more specific educational matters. However, it was important to emphasize that EdCom was working well and to ensure that it had a clear remit to ensure that it continued to do so.

90.6. **Agreed:** that EdCom endorsed the paper and the position outlined therein. The paper should now be updated as necessary following the discussion and a communications strategy developed to ensure effective engagement with the Provost, SMT, AB and other key stake-holders.
Action: Chair and Secretary

91. Interim Report from the Module Rejections Task Group

91.1. Received: the paper at EDCOM 6-03 (20-21), introduced by the Director of Education Services and Transformation who noted that this was the interim report of the Task Group previously established to address student dissatisfaction on module choice and in particular, where choices were rejected.

91.2. The Task Group had focussed on the top thirty modules for rejections and had reached broad conclusions, with some suggestions for swift actions that could be implemented for the next session. However, as many of the modules were from large and popular programmes, solutions were proving to be complex and the Task Group required more time to consider these matters before producing the full report. Consideration was also being given to longer term solutions to delivering larger and fundamental modules.

91.3. In the meantime it was requested that members note that whilst the report focussed on the top thirty modules, many more had high numbers of rejections and therefore disappointed students. It would be helpful if members could consider whether any of the identified actions to address this might be applied to other modules.

91.4. **Agreed:** that the full report of the Task Group would be circulated to EdCom for consideration in due course.
Action: Director of Education Services and Transformation

92. Proposal for Task Group to Review Affiliate Programmes

92.1. Received: the paper at EDCOM 6-04 (20-21), introduced by the Director of Education Services and Transformation. The paper proposed that a Task Group was established to review the curriculum offer for affiliate students and identify possible improvements in curriculum, policy and systems and processes. The Faculty Tutors for Engineering and the Joint Faculties had offered to co-Chair the Task Group.

92.2. It was noted that whilst affiliate students were a comparatively small group in comparison to the overall student population, around 1,000 each year, they were nonetheless important, both strategically, as many came back for further study and reputationally, as they came from a wide number of international universities. Wide dissatisfaction had been noted from many affiliates with their experience at UCL, including module choice access, and there had also been official complaints.

92.3. There was broad approval of the need for the Task Group and one member, who had undertaken substantial work on improving the affiliate experience locally in their faculty, offered to join it. It was intended that the Task Group would hold an initial meeting during the summer and then, following a data gathering exercise, meet in earnest next term.

92.4. **Agreed**: that the Task Group on Affiliate Students be established and report to EdCom during the next session.
Action: Director of Education Services and Transformation

Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

93.   Approval of New Programmes of Study

93.1. Approved - the programmes of study recommended by the Programme and Module Approval Panel (PMAP) at EDCOM 6-05 (20-21).

94.   Minutes of Sub-Committees and Working Groups

94.1. Approved – the minutes of PMAP held on 6 May 2021 at EDCOM: 6-06 (20-21).

94.2. Approved – the minutes of PMAP held on 3 June 2021 at: EDCOM 6-07 (20-21).

95.   Dates of Next Meeting

95.1. The dates of meetings for 2021-22 (provisional):

- Thursday, 14 October 2021, 10:30 - 13:00
- 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*

    * Reserved in case an additional meeting is required due to serious unforeseen circumstances. It will **not** be used if not required.

All meetings to be held on MS Teams.

Rob Traynor on behalf of Dan Derricott
EdCom Secretary

Head of Academic Policy and Quality Assurance & Deputy Director of Academic Services
Academic Services [email: dan.derricott@ucl.ac.uk}

October 2021