



Education Committee

25 September 2023

Minutes (Confirmed)

Present:

Professor Kathleen Armour (Chair)

Professor Simon Banks; Ms Karen Barnard; Mr Shaban Chaudhary; Professor Parama Chaudhury; Mr Ian Davis; Professor Sally Day; Dr Julie Evans; Mr Matteo Fumagalli; Professor Ann Griffin; Ms June Hedges; Professor Arne Hofmann; Mr Ahmad Ismail; Dr Rachel King; Dr Sandra Leaton-Gray; Mr Zak Liddell; Ms Blathnaid Mahony; Dr Jennifer McGowan; Professor Norbert Pachler; Professor Paola Pedarzani; Professor Mary Richardson; Professor Aeli Roberts; Mr Mike Rowson; Dr Francesca Scott; Dr Hazel Smith; Ms Issy Smith; Dr Fiona Strawbridge; Professor Olga Thomas; Professor Nicola Walshe; Dr Kathryn Woods and Professor Stan Zochowski.

In attendance: Ms Sally Mackenzie (Item 6); Ms Lizzie Vinton (Item 7); Ms Sarah Henderson and Ms Sarah West (Item 10); Mr Ashley Doolan (Secretary); Mr Rob Traynor (Assistant Secretary) and Ms Megan Gerrie (Observer).

Apologies: Dr Nicole Brown; Mr Daniel Farrell; Ms Marie Gallagher; Dr Margaret Mayston; Dr Bill Sillar and Dr Nalini Vittal.

Part I: Preliminary Business

1. Welcome and Announcements

1.1. The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of the new year, and extended a specific welcome to new members, Dr Francesa Scott, Director of Education and Student Experience for the Faculty of Mathematical and Physical Sciences, and the newly appointed Academic Board members: Dr Sandra Leaton Gray, Dr Jennifer McGowan, Professor Ann Griffin, and Dr Abel Nyamapfene. A welcome was also extended to the new Students' Union sabbatical officers: Muhammad Shaban Chaudhary, Ahmad Ismail and Issy Smith.

2. Terms of Reference Constitution, and Membership 2023-24

2.1. **Approved** – the terms of reference, constitution, and membership for Education Committee for the 2023-24 academic session at EDCOM 1-02 (23-24), noting the changes made to incorporate the reporting lines from the new subcommittees, the additional overview for various Office for Students conditions of registration, and the oversight of degree apprenticeship programmes.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 3.1. **Approved** – the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 July 2023 [EdCom Minutes 110-127, 2022-23] at EDCOM 1-02 (23-24), with the deletion of point 120.2 due to factual inaccuracy.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 4.1. It was noted that there were no matters arising that were not covered elsewhere in the agenda for this meeting.

5. Note of Chair's action taken since last meeting

- 5.1. **Received** – an oral report from the Chair, supported by paper EDCOM 1-03 (23-24) outlining action taken on behalf of EdCom since its last meeting on 25 July. This included the approval of the following changes to regulations:
- i. A change to the programme transfer regulations to introduce a ten-day service standard for most programme and route changes.
 - ii. A change to the provisional progression regulations to align with practice, which enabled students due to commence a study abroad year to provisionally progress with a small amount of failure outstanding.
 - iii. A revised student attendance policy.
 - iv. A revised academic misconduct policy.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

6. Excellence in Education and Student Experience at UCL

- 6.1. **Received** - papers at EDCOM 9-04A (23-24) and EDCOM 9-04B (23-24) presented by the Chair, and Ms Sally Mackenzie outlining the final proposed Statement of Excellence in Education and Student Experience and providing an overview of the various enhancement projects underpinning each principle.
- 6.2. EdCom was asked to approve the statement, and comment on whether the mapping of enhancement projects to principles was appropriate and had captured all necessary work required to achieve the goals underpinning the principles. During conversation, the following points were noted:
- i. That many of the projects were already existing or were due to commence work, with new project groups created to do more work on research intensive education, impactful learning opportunities and assessment and feedback.
 - ii. That given the increased importance placed on a university education adding value for money by both the current and shadow cabinet, and in wider society, it is vital to show that a UCL degree remains a good investment and delivers value beyond the core disciplinary skills.
 - iii. That it is difficult to prove that students are receiving a consistent, high value experience across all programmes, and that there is work to do to assure ourselves that the offer is at least comparable, if not identical.
- 6.3. **Approved** – the Statement of Excellence as presented in paper EDCOM 9-04A (23-24) and confirmed that the projects outlined in paper EDCOM 9-04B (23-24) were appropriate.

7. Teaching Excellence Framework Update

- 7.1. **Received** – a verbal report from the Chair and Ms Lizzie Vinton on the upcoming Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) publication schedule, and a reminder of how the exercise established institutional rankings. It was noted that the results were due to be published on 28 September 2023.
- 7.2. EdCom was reminded that the TEF measured an institutions' performance in key student experience and student outcomes metrics, benchmarked against comparable institutions, and balanced that with contextual information provided in written submissions from the institution and its students. It was noted that UCL's outcome would likely track closely to what would be expected based on performance in the metrics.
- 7.3. EdCom noted that, while TEF did not capture all that makes a UCL education unique and of high quality, it was a key factor in international league tables, and so could contribute positively or negatively to recruitment. This was of specific importance given the drop in UCL's relative position in the most recent NSS in the area of student satisfaction with the quality of our teaching, a measure which UCL historically performed well in.

8. Analysis of Student Survey Results 2022-23

- 8.1. Received - papers at EDCOM 1-05A (23-24) and EDCOM 1-05B (23-24) presented by Professor Parama Chaudhury analysing the quantitative results and qualitative comments of the Annual Programme Survey (APS) and National Student Survey (NSS) 2023.
- 8.2. EdCom noted that responses from continuing undergraduate (UG) students to the APS were very similar to those given by finalists in their responses to the NSS. Of the postgraduate taught (PGT) students who completed the APS, 75% confirmed that they would recommend UCL to others. Additionally:
 - i. PGT students were most positive in their responses to questions on learning resources teaching, which also score highly in the NSS. There were also high levels of positive responses for placement and additional study activity (such as study abroad) where that featured as part of the programme, with an average score of 83.5%.
 - ii. The lowest scoring areas were in Career Support and Development, Learning Community, and Language Support all scoring around 58%.
- 8.3. EdCom then received a presentation on the changes to the NSS methodology, including a change to the scoring scale being used, with the removal of the "neither agree nor disagree" option, and the reframing of several questions. It was noted that new questions on student mental health and freedom of speech had been included, and that the "Overall Satisfaction" question that formed part of the previous survey had been removed.
- 8.4. On reviewing an analysis of UCL's relative performance in the NSS over time, benchmarked against the Russell Group and the Sector, it was noted that UCL's position had worsened in all question areas, other than Student Voice. Of specific concern, UCL had come in the third quartile for Teaching and for Learning Opportunities, and the fourth quartile for Assessment and Feedback. This was a worsening of the relative position since 2021-22.
- 8.5. EdCom members discussed these results, and reflected on the impact they could have. The following points were noted:
 - i. The drop into the third quartile for the questions related to Teaching would be problematic for future TEF submissions, as this has historically not been a problem area in our metrics.
 - ii. That there is significant variability across the institution, with some departments scoring exceptionally highly in some categories and others not, often within the same

faculties. Of particular concern was the poor performance in the Teaching category in the Faculty of Engineering, and the Assessment and Feedback category in the Faculty of Social and Historical Sciences.

- iii. That a review of the free text comments seemed to indicate net dissatisfaction with study space, the timetable, student staff ratios and engagement with professional services staff. It also indicated net positive feeling about the opportunities provided to work with others, UCL's international scope, and the quality of placements and fieldwork.
- 8.6. The Chair reflected on the analysis and commented that it showed there were rooted issues that needed to be tackled within specific areas of UCL that were impacting on the overall results. She added that this had been picked up in initial feedback from the TEF panel. It was clear that enhancement work needed to be focused on the areas experiencing these persistent problems with student satisfaction, and that money and time was being allocated to do this work.
- 8.7. EdCom were informed that follow up actions would be prioritised in the areas of assessment and feedback. Those questions that had ranked in the fourth quartile in supported with a dedicated ChangeMakers project, analysing, and seeking to understand the free text comments. Most importantly, specific faculties and subject areas contributing disproportionately to the poor institutional performance would be followed up with individually.
- 8.8. The Chair concluded with a remark on how, in the free text comments that were negative, students reported feeling that they did not feel that their voice mattered, or that they were being listened to. She noted that it was possible to turn around poor performance by addressing this relatively straightforward request, and pointed to the Slade, whose staff had managed to turnaround their NSS performance within a year, based predominantly on a focused campaign of working with and listening to their students.

9. Office for Students governance update

- 9.1. Received – a paper at EDCOM 1-06 (23-24) presented by Ms Sarah Henderson detailing the updated mapping of responsibilities for Office for Students Conditions of Registrations to UCL committees, and specifically which conditions have been mapped to the Education Committee. The paper noted that the following conditions had been assigned to Education Committee:
- iv. Conditions B1 – B6, which pertain to the quality and standards of our education provision.
 - v. Conditions C1 – C3, which pertain to protection of students' rights as consumers and their avenues for redress via the complaints scheme.
 - vi. Condition E5, which relates to the facilitation of electoral registration for all eligible students.
 - vii. Condition F2, which requires UCL to publish its arrangements for students to transfer to another provider.
- 9.2. EdCom members considered the proposed mapping of conditions, and reflected on the risk assessment that was presented to inform members of how UCL understands its current level of compliance with each condition, and the measures it has in place to assure this continues. Members were also invited to review the summary of the OfS business plan for 2023-24, which outlined some of its priority areas for its compliance work, such as capturing and regulating transnational education (TNE) happening at each provider, and consulting on a new condition of registration related to protecting and promoting freedom of speech.

- 9.3. The Chair noted the importance of understanding what the compliance obligations are in order to meet them and build them into practice.
- 9.4. Education Committee thanked colleagues in the Compliance team for their work in preparing the briefing, and in helping the committee to understand its role in ensuring ongoing compliance with our registration conditions.

Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

10. Report of Special Case Panels

- 10.1. **Received** – an oral report from the Chair and Mr Zak Liddell, Director of Education Services, on three Special Case Panels that were convened by the Chair to resolve disputes between the following Boards of Examiners:
 - i. The Joint Faculty Board of Examiners and the undergraduate programme Boards of Examiners in Anthropology, History and History of Art.
 - ii. The Faculty of Engineering Board of Examiners and the undergraduate programme Board of Examiners in Computer Science.
 - iii. The Faculty of Brain Sciences Board of Examiners and the undergraduate programme Board of Examiners in Linguistics.
- 10.2. It was noted that in all cases, the members of the Special Case Panel considered carefully the individual student mark profiles of the over 100 students not originally awarded by their respective Boards of Examiners, either due to blanket approaches to decision-making about the appropriate use of mitigation, or due to concerns linked to potential over awarding. In all cases the Special Case Panel found that the students could be awarded, based on review of their marks and mitigation practice followed in other Boards..

Secretary's Note: the written report of the Special Case Panel was subsequently circulated as paper EDCOM 1-08 (23-24)

11. Approval of new programmes of study

- 11.1. Approved – the new programmes of study recommended by PMAP EDCOM 1-07 (23-24).

12. Any Other Business

- 12.1. The Chair noted that she had been notified of no other business.

13. Dates of Next Meeting

- 13.1. The date of the next meeting of Education Committee is Tuesday, 17 October 2023 at 14:00.

Ashley Doolan (EdCom Secretary)
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September 2023