Library Committee

Wednesday 2 June 2021, 10:00am
Web conferencing meeting via MS Teams

Minutes

Present Members:
Dr Paul Ayris (Chair); Dr Simon Banks; Mr Ayman Benmati; Dr Richard Freeman; Dr Oliver Gerstenberg [for Minutes 26-31.2]; Dr Liza Griffin; Dr Charles Inskip [for Minutes 26-31.2]; Professor Diane Koenker [for Minutes 26-31.2]; Mr Zak Liddell; Mr Ben Meunier; Mr Martin Moyle; Professor Vivek Mudera [for Minutes 26-31.2]; Dr John Sabapathy; Mr Andy Smith [for Minutes 26-31.1].

Apologies:
Ms Kate Pearce; Professor David Price; Dr Rachel Rees; Dr Harriet Shannon.

Officer:
Ms Freya Markwell

Part I: Preliminary Business

26. Minutes of the last meeting (3-01)

26.1. Library Committee (LC) approved the minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2021.

27. Matters Arising

27.1. Arising from minute 17.2c, it was noted that a report on monitoring acquisition and usage of digital textbooks had been received from the Director of Services (UCL Library Services) and this would be discussed later in the meeting.

27.2. Arising from minute 18.3, the Chair confirmed that he would update LC on the Provost's feedback on the Library of the Future as part of his Chair's report.

Part II: Strategic Items for Discussion

28. The role of the Library in Research, Innovation and Global Engagement (verbal update)

28.1. The Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) provided a verbal update setting out the likely role of the Library in Research, Innovation and Global Engagement in light of a large-scale review of UCL's management structure which was being led by the Provost. The following points were made during the presentation:

a. The remit of Professor David Price, LC's current Chair, had recently expanded from Vice-Provost (Research) to Vice-Provost (Research, Innovation and Global Engagement (RIGE)). It was hoped that the Vice-Provost (RIGE) would still be able remain as Chair for LC but this remained under discussion.

b. The Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) and the Vice-Provost (RIGE) had been taking part in daily meetings with external consultants on the proposed new governance structure to iron out arrangements for the new committees. Meetings had also taken place with each of the other Vice-Provosts to discuss potential overlaps between the committees resulting from the proposed reorganisation. It was suggested that these meetings had now completed their purpose as agreement had been reached on how potential overlaps and duplications would be managed.

c. Under the proposed new structure, the Library would account for 50% of overall staffing numbers within RIGE, making it an influential part of the new portfolio of the Vice-Provost (RIGE).

d. As part of the reorganisation proposed by the Provost, it was anticipated that the current Senior Management Team (SMT) would be stood down from 31 July 2021 and that a new University Management Committee (UMC) would be established in its place. This UMC would have a different membership from that of the SMT and would include Deans of Faculty and Vice-Presidents, as well as Heads of Professional Services functions who would then have parity with Deans in their remits.

e. The Provost's proposed new structure included 11 sub-committees sitting underneath UMC, each focussed on a different area of operational activity; some of these would be pre-existing committees and some would be newly created committees. A number of these committees would be of interest to LC, most notably the new RIGE Committee. Going forward, it was anticipated that this would be the committee into which LC would report.

f. Further clarity was needed as to whether the LC's annual reports would still go up to Academic Board. The Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) stated that he would strongly advocate for this to continue.

28.2. The following points were raised in discussion:
    a. There was positive feedback regarding the proposed new structure and the way in which each committee had a clear purpose and all the committees connected into UMC, with no 'orphaned' committees.
    b. It was noted that the Digital Strategy Committee was of particular interest to LC due to the intersections of their respective digital agendas. It was agreed that there were opportunities for constructive collaboration between the two committees in this area.
    c. Other committees of particular interest to LC included the Education and Student Experience Committee, the Operations Committee, the Estates Management Committee and the People and Culture Committee.
    d. There was a comment that, as the Library's activities were increasingly implicated in the world of education and the student experience, it was particularly important that there was a regular line of communication between LC and the Education and Student Experience Committee. The Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) confirmed that this had been considered and that, whilst it was anticipated that LC would report into RIGE, there would be regular meetings between the Chairs of LC and the Education and Student Experience Committee to ensure overlapping points were addressed collaboratively.
    e. The Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) reported that he had requested that members of his staff be included within RIGE and relevant committees as representatives of Library Services; this would ensure liaison on key matters affecting Library Services such as space.
    f. There was a comment about the competitive bidding process when it came to the allocation of 'pots' of money to different areas of UCL; it was suggested that bids towards routine estates maintenance critical to the student experience should be prioritised.
    g. The Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) reported that the Vice-Provost (Education & Student Experience) was keen to take an active role in championing the Library at a senior level and it was important that they were briefed regularly on key updates.

29. Report from the Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) (3-02)

29.1. The Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) introduced the report on Library activity and developments in the areas of the UCL Library Services Strategy 2019-22 since the last meeting of LC. The following key points were highlighted:
    a. The results of the Student Experience Survey (SES) 2021 showed an overall 14% decrease in student satisfaction in the area of Learning Resources since the survey was last run in 2019. A decrease in scores in this area had been expected given the closure of Library sites due to the pandemic and the resulting impact on access to physical resources.
    b. Some questions had been added to the survey for 2021 which specifically addressed UCL's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. On these

questions, the highest score was against the statement: "I have been able to access the learning resources I need for my course during the Covid-19 pandemic", which had a score of 76.8%. This was seen as a pleasing commendation of work undertaken by Library colleagues in highly challenging circumstances; however, there was room for further improvement and the Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) invited input from LC as to how this might be achieved, particularly in the short to medium term assuming some physical restrictions remained ongoing.

c.   The creation of a virtual UCL Research Institute for Collections (RIC), planned for launch in summer 2021, was highlighted as a key development area intended to further embed the Library within the research domain.

d.   The Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) stated the aim of UCL Library Services to act as a beacon of best practice with global impact, especially now that it was part of RIGE. The following areas of work already being undertaken towards this aim in UCL Special Collections were highlighted:

   i.   Work being undertaken with external digitisation in order to make UCL's research collections more globally available.
   ii.   The setting up of visiting fellowships and visiting scholarships for students.
   iii.   The work of the UCL Press.
   iv.   The bringing in of activities in museums and art galleries and department-level activities.

e.   The Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) welcomed comments on how UCL Library Services could build on the activities listed above.

29.2.   A number of points were raised by LC during discussion as follows:

a.   LC welcomed all mechanisms to make UCL's Special Collections more visible, engaging and accessible, both internally and externally.

b.   In relation to the decreased SES score in the Learning Resources section, it was suggested that this served to emphasise the importance of UCL's physical space and collections and the key role that these played in the wider learning culture and community. It was encouraging that 76.8% of students had still been able to access the learning resources they needed and Library colleagues were commended for the level of service they had maintained during the pandemic.

c.   The Director of Operations (UCL Library Services) reported on a virtual learning spaces pilot which had launched on 17 May and was set to run until 17 June. This piloted service allowed students to log in and study in a virtual learning space via a Zoom platform. Take-up so far had been relatively low due to the time of year but positive feedback had been received from students who had used the service. Over the coming weeks, Postgraduate Research (PGR) students would be encouraged to use the service to help foster their sense of learning community. A research assistant had been appointed to analyse data on the usage of

these virtual spaces with a view to establishing whether these should be kept as a complement to the Library's physical spaces on a more long-term basis.

d. A question was raised as to how information about these new services was being disseminated to students, as there had been some reported confusion from students about changes to the Library's services during the pandemic. The Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) explained that the fast-moving situation and changes in governmental regulations had forced the Library to make very quick decisions such as the closure of sites and this had presented challenges in terms of communicating changes. It was noted that an Operational Oversight Group (OOG) comprised of senior managers from Library Services and SMT had been meeting regularly over the past year to review service responsiveness and communications. The OOG was due to meet the following week to consider potential improvements to be made for next academic year, including how the Library could most effectively communicate to users.

e. There was a concern raised that, despite efforts made at the Bartlett to communicate with students in relation to learning resources during the pandemic, the Bartlett's SES results had been disappointing in this area. It was reported that there had been some issues at the Bartlett at the beginning of the academic year with some digital resources not having been made available in time for teaching. The following steps would be taken to review these issues and to discuss improvements to avoid a recurrence of these problems next year:

   i. Qualitative results from the SES would be studied closely.

   ii. The Director of Services (UCL Library Services) would meet with the Faculty's Library Liaison and other relevant colleagues at the Bartlett.

   iii. The Director of Services (UCL Library Services) would also aim to join the Bartlett's next Faculty Library Committee meeting.

f. The Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) expressed thanks to LC for their input on the Library of the Future strategy which had received positive feedback from the Provost. The following key messages of the strategy had been highlighted:

   i. The proposal for a new 24-hour student centre seating 1,000 students, ideally in Bloomsbury, to meet the need for additional study space capacity.

   ii. The need to rethink the nature of UCL's Science Library and provision across UCL to provide a more modern and accessible user experience.

   iii. The suggested creation of a dedicated central study space for PGR students.

g. The Vice-Provost (Education and Student Experience) had been supportive in principle of the proposal for the new student centre. It was hoped that this could be pushed forward within the next UCL strategy as a potential major contribution to UCL going forward. However, it was noted

that it might not be feasible for all of the proposals to be implemented due to cost restrictions.

h. There was discussion about whether the increase in remote working amongst staff might free up estate for the provision of a PGR study space. It was noted that the Future of Work Group was reviewing how campus space would be used in the medium to long term, but it was unclear if there was scope for the question of PGR space to be brought into these discussions. Due to additional staff having been recruited in many areas, it seemed likely that there would not be additional space capacity without significant reworking.

i. There was a general consensus that PGR students would prefer study space to be provided within their own departments and that there therefore may not be much take-up of a central PGR study space. There was also a concern raised that, if departments perceived that there was space available centrally, this may encourage them to offer less desk space within the department which could reduce the sense of departmental experience and community. The Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) suggested that, if there was less demand for a central PGR study space, the other two proposals should perhaps be prioritised.

j. The Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) confirmed that progress on the Library of the Future strategy would form part of their regular reporting to LC at future meetings.

(Action: Director of Services (UCL Library Services))

30.   Learning spaces and health and safety during lockdown (3-03)

30.1. The Director of Operations (UCL Library Services) introduced the report on learning spaces and health and safety during the lockdown. The following key points were highlighted:

a. This was a follow-up on the paper presented at the November LC meeting which looked at the provision of study spaces and management of spaces. At that time, libraries had recently reopened after the lockdown; since then, there had been two further lockdowns and all libraries had been forced to close in early January.

b. Library Services had managed to offer over 1,000 study spaces with social distancing in place; a large contributor in this increased number of study spaces had been the temporary repurposing of Professional Services offices at Bidborough House, Ramsay Hall and 1-19 Torrington Place. All library sites had now reopened and Library Services was on the cusp of relinquishing these temporary extra spaces to be repurposed ready for the next academic year.

c. One key development since the previous report was the implementation of an adapted space booking system launched on 1 March. With this new system, any bookings for which students had failed to check in within a set timeframe were automatically flagged as a no-show; this had helped to

manage actual usage of space. The statistics showed a reduction in occupancy numbers since the implementation of this system as only those students who had turned up for their bookings were now being counted. This system had proven effective and would remain in place for the foreseeable future.

d. Over the past academic year, Safety Services had carried out several visits and audits to ensure compliance with Covid-19 safety measures. Most sites had received a green rating (denoting compliance/only low risk non-conformities) but there had been one amber rating for the Science Library (denoting that several higher-risk non-conformities had been identified). This result was due to non-compliance by some students with the safety measures. Management of student behaviour would be a key challenge for Library Services going forwards. It was suggested that a more robust escalation mechanism at institutional level for Covid-19 safety breaches would be helpful as polite reminders to students were not always sufficient. The response taken by Library Services had been to close sites where such breaches jeopardised the safety of library users. Library Services had also been working closely with the Students' Union (SU) since April to get messaging out to students via SU channels as well as via myUCL on the importance of compliance with safety measures.

e. Library Services was working to support its staff with flexible working where possible whilst ensuring a critical number of staff on campus. It was noted that many Library staff had continued to come in to work on campus throughout the pandemic and their exemplary efforts to ensure services remained open were commended.

f. It was noted that financial constraints remained a key challenge to estates operations, given the additional resources required to keep services open, such as enhanced cleaning regimes in public areas of the libraries. Estates had initially reduced the number of security staff overnight to reflect the reduced numbers of students on campus, however it had been found that in some places, additional staffing resources were required following reports of breaches of Covid-19 regulations after 21:00. Library Services were in negotiation with Estates and Finance to request additional security resources to be put in place to ensure that safety standards were maintained.

g. The overall picture going into the next academic year was positive. Conversations were ongoing with relevant groups about how to cope with the anticipated student 'bulge' and the prospect of social distancing if necessary.

30.2. The following points were raised in discussion:

a. In relation to the issue of student breaches of Covid-19 regulations, further exploration was needed to ensure a robust approach to deal with such breaches. It would be helpful to have clarity as to whether this was a purely operational matter or whether a regulatory change would be required.

b. A comment was raised that there could be a second 'bulge' in incoming first-year student numbers in the coming academic year with the cancellation of A-levels. It would be prudent to consider over the summer how pressures on physical space should be handled if there were an increased number of incoming students for the second consecutive year.

c. The Director of Operations (UCL Library Services) provided reassurance that the Vice-Provost (Education & Student Experience) was very alert to the challenges posed by the increase in student numbers and advocated for more library spaces to be made available even if social distancing were no longer to be required as there would still be a net increase in demand for space. Estates were already working to identify where additional study spaces could be provided, both within and outside the libraries.

31. Usage of collections during the Covid-19 pandemic (3-04)

31.1. The Director of Services (UCL Library Services) introduced the paper, which set out information about the usage of UCL Library Services' physical and digital collections during the Covid-19 pandemic. The following key points were highlighted:

a. The usage of Library spaces had changed dramatically with the onset of Covid-19 in March 2020; this had forced Library Services to come up with new ways of working to ensure students and staff could continue to access the resources they needed.

b. There had been an inevitable decrease in the volume of books being borrowed in comparison to previous years; however Library Services had still dealt with over 40,000 physical library loans during 2020-21 as at 17 May 2021. This was noteworthy given the more resource-intensive nature of Click and Collect lending and the careful planning and commitment required on the part of borrowers.

c. There had been a steady decline in physical book loans over the past decade showing that this trend had begun even before the pandemic.

d. The Scan and Send service had proven popular, particularly amongst Arts, Humanities and Social Studies (AHSS) students entering into independent research. It was planned to maintain this service for the foreseeable future. It was likely that the Click and Collect service would also be maintained.

e. UCL Library Services had considerably increased its investment in digital collections. SCONUL's most recent annual dataset from 2019-20 showed that UCL's overall performance in the number of downloads of digital journal articles was strong, with the third-highest number of article downloads compared to the other institutions included in the data. UCL's ranking fell to sixth for scholarly downloads per full-time (FTE) student; however it was noted that this metric overlooked the fact that students were not the primary audience for UCL's journals. In terms of e-book chapter downloads per FTE student, UCL had a consistently low rank

within this group of comparators for the past 3 years; however it was encouraging that its 2019-20 performance was up to the median level. It was hard to draw firm conclusions from this data due to the amount of change that had taken place since 2019-20 and it was agreed it would be interesting to see data for the 2020-21 session once available.

    f.   The cost of digital textbooks varied hugely and these could be very expensive. UCL had invested in approximately 750 digital textbooks since Summer 2021 with an average cost per title of £1,924. Overall usage of these textbooks was strong with a total of 282,238 chapter downloads. Data on the range of textbooks downloaded suggested that some had been underused, however downloads were still accumulating and overall, the purchase of digital textbooks in 2020-21 was deemed a success story. Library Services was now taking advantage of the additional data and lead time in order to build on this success further for next academic year.

31.2.   The following points were raised in discussion:

    a.   There was a question raised about the extent to which UCL might be paying for similar content twice if different members of staff had requested textbooks with overlapping subject matter. It was noted that this had also historically been the case with books in the libraries and that the increased usage of digital textbooks offered a great opportunity for cross-module working to consolidate resources and ensure maximum value for money. The Library's subject liaison team would also check with module leads who had previously requested books if they wanted these to be repurchased based on price and usage so far; this would hopefully identify where some books may not be worth repurchasing.

    b.   The Faculty representative from Engineering Sciences reported that, in his role as Chair of the Desktop Applications Group (DAG), he had led a process by which requests for UCL Desktop applications were prioritised and deduplicated; he suggested that there might be some analogies with the work that the library would be doing to prioritise textbooks and offered to share his experience. The Director of Services (UCL Library Services) would follow up with colleagues to let them know.

    c.   All was progressing well with UCL Press and it was noted that a Programme Editor had recently been appointed to put together a portfolio of materials for developing an Open Access E-Textbook platform.

    d.   A comment was raised about the possible implications of the multimedia agenda in relation to the Research Excellence Framework (REF); it was suggested that further consideration should be given to this ahead of the next REF review.

    e.   There was a question raised about the pedagogical effects of the rapid shift to a digital-first approach, as necessitated by the pandemic. It was suggested that consideration should be given to what kinds of learning were best facilitated by hard copy learning over digital learning, and vice versa.

f.   There was discussion about how best to incentivise UCL's own highly-qualified academic staff to produce digital content themselves, for example by incorporating this within promotional criteria and emphasising the global reach of these resources beyond UCL, as well as the cost benefits of in-house content creation. It was suggested that it would also be useful to make staff more aware of the costs of books they had requested and to steer them towards lower cost alternatives where available.

(Action: Director of Services (UCL Library Services))

32.   Report on Open Science and Scholarship (3-05)

32.1.   The Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) introduced the paper, which set out a summary of high-level strategic work in Open Science, as reflected in the work of the new UCL Office for Open Science and Scholarship. The following points were highlighted:
a.   The development of UCL's e-textbook platform, UCL Press, was a particularly key area to note; this had already been covered sufficiently within discussions earlier in the meeting.

33.   Records Management Policy Update (verbal update)

33.1.   The Director of Services (UCL Library Services) provided a verbal update on the status of UCL's Records Management Policy. The following key points were highlighted:
a.   It was noted that Records Management were preparing a revised version of UCL's Records Management Policy. The policy needed to be modernised and firmed up in places to provide clarity on the commitments and responsibilities.
b.   Once the updated draft policy had been finalised, this would be shared with academic colleagues for consultation and feedback. It was anticipated that this consultation would take place via LC.

34.   Senate House Library/UoL update (verbal update)

34.1.   The Director of Services (UCL Library Services) provided a verbal update regarding Senate House Library/UoL. The following points were highlighted:
a.   It was noted that a new Senate House Librarian, Catríona Cannon, had recently been appointed and would be joining from summer 2021. During this transitionary period, certain areas of interest previously highlighted by LC were temporarily on hold.

34.2.   The Director of Services (UCL Library Services) would provide an update on developments with Senate House Library/UoL at LC's next meeting.

(Action: Director of Services (UCL Library Services))

Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

35.   Project bidding in UCL Library Services (3-06)

35.1. LC received the termly summary report on Library's progress on project bidding applications.

36.   Reports from Library Working Groups (3-07)

36.1. Since the last meeting, LC had received the following minutes of Working Groups that report to LC:
   a.   Bibliometrics Working Group – 8 February 2021 (unconfirmed);
   b.   Open Science and Scholarship Committee – 17 December 2020 and 16 March 2021 (unconfirmed);
   c.   Press and Publications Board – 20 January 2021.

37.   Reports from Faculty Library Committees (3-08)

37.1. Since the last meeting, LC had received the following minutes of Faculty-level or Faculty Library Committees (FLCs) that report to LC:
   a.   Arts & Humanities and Social & Historical Sciences Joint Faculty Library Committee – 10 February 2021;
   b.   Built Environment Faculty Library Committee – 26 November 2020, 11 February 2021 and 6 May 2021;
   c.   Engineering Sciences Faculty Research Degrees Committee – 18 March 2020 and 10 June 2020;
   d.   Engineering Sciences Faculty Teaching Committee – 14 May 2020, 17 February 2021, 24 March 2021, 21 April 2021 and 5 May 2021;
   e.   Medical Sciences Faculty Teaching Committee – 6 November 2020 and 2 February 2021.

38.   Date of the next meeting

38.1. The schedule of LC meetings for 2021-22 had yet to be confirmed.

39.   Any Other Business

39.1. It was reported that at the recent SLASH Joint Faculty Library Committee, there had been healthy discussion in relation to a new draft collections strategy. It was anticipated that this draft collections strategy would come to the Term 1 2021-22 LC meeting for approval.

39.2. It was noted that a recent BBC documentary, "Subnormal: A British Scandal", had featured shots of the UCL Library and that the closing credits included thanks to colleagues at the UCL Institute of Education including Nazlin Bhimani. LC commended the dedication of Library staff who had been continuing to come in to work throughout the pandemic at their own personal risk. The Pro-Vice-Provost (UCL Library Services) stated that he would pass on these words of appreciation to Library colleagues within the next Library newsletter.

Freya Markwell
June 2021