



Confirmed

## Student Recruitment, Admissions and Funding Committee

8 December 2020

### Minutes

Present:

Professor Anthony Smith (Chair), Ms Wendy Appleby, Dr Simon Banks, Mr Ayman Benmati, Dr Sarah Bennett, Professor David Bogle, Mrs Fernanda Bowler, Professor Clare Brooks, Professor Stella Bruzzi, Professor Arne Hofmann, Mr Kevin King, Ms Katja Lamping, Ms Collette Lux, Ms Bella Malins, Mr Jim Onyemenam, Ms Katy Redfern, Ms Lara Reichle, Dr David Sim, Dr Hazel Smith and Mr Dean Stokes

In attendance: Mr Neil Green (Minute 7), Dr Rebecca Lindner (Minute 6), Mr Kris Ilic (Minute 9), Ms Sonia Virdee (Minute 13), Mr Arvind Vepa, Mr Alexander Watson (for Dr Elinor Jones) and Mr Rob Traynor (Secretary).

Guests – Ms Namita Pandey (Item 8), Ms Naomi Mithran (Student and Registry Services, observing the meeting)

Apologies: Ms Fernanda Bowler, Professor Clare Brooks, Professor Mark Emberton, Dr Elinor Jones, Professor Norbert Pachler and Professor Nigel Titchener-Hooker.

### Part I: Preliminary Business

#### 1. Constitution and Terms of Reference 2020-21

1.1. Approved – the terms of reference, constitution and membership for the Student Recruitment, Admissions and Funding Committee 2020-21 at StRAFC 1-01 (20-21).

1.2. StRAFC welcomed the following new members:

- Mr Ayman Benmati, ex officio, Education Officer, Students' Union (SU);
- Professor Clare Brooks, Pro-Director (Education), Institute of Education (IOE);
- Dr Hazel Smith, Faculty Tutor, Faculty of Life Sciences (SLMS);
- Professor Arne Hofmann, Faculty Tutor Joint Faculties Arts and Humanities and Social and Historical Sciences (SLASH);
- Dr Sarah Bennett, Admissions Tutor UCL Medical School (SLMS).

#### 2. Minutes of the Last Meeting

2.1. Approved – the Minutes of the previous meeting at StRAFC 1-02 (20-21), held on 9 June 2020 [StRAFC Minutes 10-18, 09.06.2020].

### **3. Matters Arising from the Minutes**

#### **3A Proposed Changes to the Graduate Admissions Process**

- 3A.1 The Director of Access and Admissions provided an update on the changes to the graduate admissions process, which were broadly endorsed by StRAFC at the previous meeting (StRAFC Minute 14, 06.02.20).
- 3A.2 Improvements continued to be made to UCL Select and increased use of more technical enhancements and solutions to save staff time. The Senior Management Team (SMT) did not approve the proposal to introduce new application rounds and deadlines, but improved messaging was being used instead. Development was underway to make greater use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the calculation of Chinese transcript grades to process the large application numbers more quickly. The Admissions Requirements Panel (ARP) also tightened the English language requirements to address the problems of under-performance of Chinese students from the 2+2 degrees. These students now needed three years taught in English rather than the previous two, or a higher English test score (e.g. IELTS).
- 3A.3 A review of Admissions will commence in January by external consultants and will cover all levels of admissions, not just Postgraduate. It will include departments and faculties and StRAFC members are encouraged to participate. The resulting report and recommendations will be submitted to StRAFC.

## **Part II: Matters for Discussion**

### **4. Admissions Update**

- 4.1. Received – a summary of the 2020 admissions cycle at StRAFC 1-03 (20-21) reported by the Director of Access and Admissions, who noted that direct comparisons to previous years were difficult due to the COVID 19 pandemic:
- a) The trend for year on year rises continued for the UK, EU and Overseas categories for undergraduate (UG) applications, offers and acceptances. This also included EU applicants (+7.3%), perhaps motivated by the final year of lower fees before Brexit took effect.
  - b) More UG offers were made (25%) as a contingency for the pandemic, including the problems with A level results for UK students, and to mitigate for any shortfalls in numbers of students enrolling. The aim was to limit UCL's exposure to any worsening circumstances. In the event acceptances were up (+23%) on 2019 and the offer to acceptance conversion rate was similar (32%), though the UK rate was again lower than for EU or Overseas.
  - c) Postgraduate Taught (PGT) applications increased by 22% overall with a large increase again for Overseas (+25%), with many applications continuing to be received from China. PGT offers were also increased (+17%) as for UG level to mitigate against any negative effects on recruitment from the pandemic.

Acceptances (+20%) also increased as did conversion of firm acceptances of offers (+1.7%), though this declined slightly for EU applicants (-1.5%).

- d) Postgraduate research (PGR) applications increased by 3%, similar to 2019 as did the number of offers and acceptances (+3.5%). Detailed PGR data is reported to Research Degrees Committee (RDC).

4.2. StRAFC will continue to be updated on the admissions data in future meetings.

## 5. Offer Making Strategy for 2021 Entry

5.1. Received – paper StRAFC 1-04 (20-21) presented by the Director of Access and Admissions who noted that COVID 19 led to an increase in the number of deferrals for 2020-21 and impacted applicant conversion rates. This will be further affected by the fee status change for EU students. The SMT had agreed that there should be more central and faculty oversight of PGT offer making to avoid large unplanned over-shoots and to align it with UG practice.

5.2. StRAFC was asked to consider how to factor the above in the UCL Offer Making Strategy and was asked to discuss the following:

- a) Consider the impact of the 2020 cycle on conversion rates and the use of 2020 data in calculating 2021 offer targets – the report recommended not to use 2020 data for offer targets (unless examinations were cancelled again by the government) and instead to use 2017-19 data. It was noted that the SMT and Academic Planning Group were considering target numbers, including the methodology for an agreed institutional approach.

**Agreed** - to use an average of the 2017-19 data for the Offer Making Strategy as members considered the 2020 data to be too much of an outlier due to the pandemic. However, the 2020 data might be of use in informing targets at a more local level for some programmes\*.

- b) Consider how to treat deferral applicants in the offer calculations – there were large increases for both UG and PGT applicants, with the latter particularly high at over 6,000 students. Miscalculating the number of applicants with deferrals that enroll could lead to either under-shooting or exceeding offer targets, with potential problems for either scenario. The report recommended that StRAFC agree likely attrition rates for deferrals and to then apply these figures to the offer calculations and adjust accordingly.

**Agreed** – to place greater focus on PGT deferrals but exercise care in any assumptions that high numbers of students won't enroll. A decision on factoring deferrals into offer calculations should be taken after the planned Admissions work in January to contact applicants and gauge intentions on their offers.

- c) Consider whether to include applicants with offers from 2020, but taking examinations in the offer calculations or remove them once results were known – the report recommended that such applicants are contacted and asked to inform UCL of their grades as soon as they had them. The number of successful applicants could then be taken away from intake targets used to calculate the number of offers required.

**Agreed** – to contact students through the “keep warm” activities to gauge student intentions and if possible, results. However, this might prove difficult in some cases as some schools had late assessments for these students, even in the summer period.

- d) Consider the likely impact of Brexit and fee status changes on EU conversion rates – the report recommended that offer calculations assume that EU conversion rates would largely match historic Overseas conversion rates. However, StRAFC cautioned that this assumption was risky due to Brexit, higher fees and the pandemic. A more nuanced approach might be taken, e.g. using the EU East-West split, with the wealthier Western countries less likely to have large application falls compared to the East.

**Agreed** – to exercise caution in making assumptions around EU applicants behaving similarly to other international students. To consider focussing attention on programmes with high EU numbers. In the longer term, UCL might wish to consider bursaries and scholarships to attract poorer but high achieving EU students, particularly from less wealthy countries.

- e) StRAFC also agreed that it was very important that UCL should not lower its offer standards, as some other institutions were considering.

**\*Note:** Following the Government’s announcement to revert to Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) and cancel external examinations, UCL will be using 2020 data only to calculate offer targets.

- 5.3. Approved – the report at StRAFC 1-04 (20-21) subject to the points raised in the discussion, with Access and Admissions to take further action where necessary. StRAFC to be kept updated on the progress of the Offer Making Strategy.

**Action – Director of Access and Admissions**

## **6. Barriers to Doctoral Education Report**

- 6.1. Received – the paper at StRAFC 1-05 (20-21) presented by Professor David Bogle, Pro-Vice-Provost of the UCL Doctoral School and Dr Rebecca Lindner (UCL Doctoral School). The report, previously discussed by Research Degrees Committee (RDC), identified structural barriers in doctoral education to students from non-traditional, disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds. Its recommendations were aimed at addressing these barriers, both at local level and for those requiring institutional consideration with wider strategic and resource implications. StRAFC was asked to discuss and to endorse the report.

- 6.2. The barriers facing students from non-traditional and disadvantaged backgrounds were often a continuation of those facing students at earlier stages of learning. This included financial considerations with many students having to work through UG and PGT levels to support themselves, possibly affecting their attainment and increased debt levels deterring potential PGR applicants. At PGR level, these students, including many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students, also faced barriers of existing lower participation and lack of peers or role models to help

inclusion, as less students made it to higher levels of study. The BAME attainment gap, although narrowing at UCL, might also affect the numbers progressing.

- 6.3. The report also identified structural barriers in Higher Education to recruitment of students from lower participation groups. This included implicit selection bias in universities as people tended to choose students from similar backgrounds, as well as problems in some PGR recruitment processes. For example, doctoral training partnerships tended to bypass the UCL admissions system and recruit students directly, using processes that may unwittingly exclude lower participation groups.
- 6.4. The report recommended that PGR recruitment practices be reviewed and in some case brought into line with HR staff recruitment practice, for example the practice of looking at references before making offers. The report also recommended that PGR recruitment should be aligned with the UCL student recruitment system, with all applicants going through UCL Select. The recommendations would help remove unconscious bias from recruitment processes.
- 6.5. StRAFC welcomed the report and noted that it raised questions of fairness in PGR recruitment, identified the need to remove bias from selection processes and suggest solutions such as improved staff training. It suggested that a pilot might be run in a faculty or department, working with Faculty Graduate Tutors and Vice-Deans Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). The report could also contribute to the wider strategy for improving under-represented student group recruitment and increase the potential pool for PGR level. Access and Admissions were keen to support this work and agreed to include PGR recruitment in the forthcoming review of Admissions.
- 6.6. **Agreed** – that StRAFC endorses the Barriers to Doctoral Education report and supports wider consideration of its recommendations in UCL, as well as the proposal to include PGR recruitment in the forthcoming Admissions review. StRAFC to be kept informed of progress of the report's recommendations.

**Action – Access and Admissions and Doctoral School officers to note**

## 7. Working with Agents

- 7.1. Received – the paper at StRAFC 1-06 (20-21) presented by Ms Katja Lamping, Director of Student Recruitment and Mr Neil Green, Head of International Student Recruitment (both Communication and Marketing - CAM). StRAFC was asked to note an SMT approved initiative designed to lessen UCL's reliance on the Chinese market at PGT level. This was to work with international student recruitment agencies using a tiered commission payment system.
- 7.2. The paper noted the high number of Chinese students at UCL, comprising 40% of international students in 2019-20. It also noted that in 2018-19 sixteen PGT programmes had over 75% of students from China, including three at 100%. This over-reliance on one country risked UCL being affected by year to year fluctuations in

market conditions, exacerbated by current geo-political uncertainty between UK and China. This was also against a context of changes to EU student tuition fees arising from Brexit, which led to uncertainty in applications from that source.

- 7.3. Three education recruitment agencies were being considered, IDP, Si-UK and UKEAS. All had expertise in international recruitment and a presence in the Far East and other markets that could help UCL to balance its international profile. The agencies would earn a commission on recruited students once enrolled. The paper outlined a tiered approach to payments with three rates depending on factors such as the difficulty of recruitment for particular programmes. This would only be for those PGT programmes with a high current reliance on China.
- 7.4. StRAFC advised CAM to discuss the identified programmes' recruitment needs with Faculty Graduate Tutors and faculty professional service staff, though they should bear in mind the additional pressures which they were currently under. CAM was also working with Access and Admissions on the proposals and noted that existing initiatives, for example on recruitment in India, would continue. It was also suggested that CAM discuss how additional strains on the admissions process could be avoided or managed should the initiative lead to higher overall levels of recruitment.
- 7.5. StRAFC will be kept informed on the progress of the initiative to use the education recruitment agencies.

## **8. Introduction of UCL's India Representative: Namita Pandey**

- 8.1. The Director of Student Recruitment introduced Ms Namita Pandey, the new UCL India Representative to the Committee. Ms Pandey informed StRAFC of her new role, starting in January 2021, to help lead recruitment of UG Indian students. Ms Pandey was based in New Delhi and had previously worked with Sheffield Hallam University to help increase Indian student recruitment there.
- 8.2. The Chair and members warmly welcomed Ms Pandey to her new role and wished her the best of success in it.

## **9. Update on the Postgraduate Open Days**

- 9.1. Mr Kris Ilic, Head of MarComms and the Director of Student Recruitment provided StRAFC with an update on the Postgraduate Open Days.
- 9.2. A series of Open Days had been held on-line due to the continuing COVID 19 pandemic. Potential applicants were encouraged to register on a platform for the events and over 3,000 had signed up so far. A number of events were planned including question and answer sessions with academic staff and events focussing on support from professional services, including Careers and Accommodation. Many student volunteers had also been recruited to help at the events.

- 9.3. StRAFC was further informed of the different approaches being taken with potential students from different countries, including targeting adverts for the Open Days at different social media platforms depending on their popularity with the target demographic. A positive response had been received so far from potential students.

## **10. Update on the New Guidance Counsellors Website**

- 10.1. The Director of Student Recruitment informed StRAFC of a new webpage aimed at school [counsellors and teachers](#). This was designed to provide support for these staff to help them discuss with their pupils whether UCL was the right university for them. Extensive information was provided as well as links to the wider UCL website and sections on the application process, frequently asked questions and the UCL approach to education. Members were asked to inform colleagues involved in student recruitment of the webpage, particularly those who dealt with schools and colleges.

## **11. Postgraduate Taught UK Bursary Scheme**

- 11.1. Received – the paper at StRAFC 1-07 (20-21), presented by Mr Kevin King, Head of Student Funding. The paper proposed a new bursary scheme to support UK PGT students from groups currently under-represented at UCL. The scheme would be funded from additional tuition fee income and was recommended for approval by the Scholarships and Bursaries Working Group (SBWG).
- 11.2. The SBWG proposed to introduce partial bursaries of £10k, which could be combined with a Government loan and cover a significant proportion of study costs. This would be conducted in two phases, with Phase 1 targeted at UK PGT alumni ex-bursary holders, to enable use of existing data to help implement a means tests scheme for September 2021 entry. The effectiveness of Phase 1 would then be analysed and the processes extended and amended as necessary. It was hoped to widen the scheme for Phase 2 to means test all UK PGT applicants, for the 2022-23 session.
- 11.3. **Approved** – Phase 1 of the PGT Bursary scheme for UK students. StRAFC to consider Phase 2, widening of the scheme to all UK PGT applicants once implementation and review of Phase 1 was undertaken in the next session.  
**Action – the Head of Student Funding and Head of Access to note**

## **Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information**

### **12. StRAFC Annual Report 2019-20**

- 12.1. **Approved** – the StRAFC Annual Report 2019-20 at StRAFC 1-08 (20-21). This will now be submitted to Academic Committee.

### **13. Any Other Business – Undergraduate Fee Bursary Proposal**

- 13.1. Received – a late paper outlining an UG Fee Bursary Proposal at StRAFC 1-09 (20-21), introduced by Dr Sonia Virdee, Strategic Planning Integration Director, Planning Team.
- 13.2. The paper proposed to introduce an UG fee bursary or fee discount for offer holders to a limited number of Arts and Humanities programmes, with potential for widening the scope later. This intended to help mitigate for the anticipated reduction in applications due to the change in EU fee status. The programmes selected had large numbers of EU students and although the scheme would also be open to overseas students for legal reasons, it was hoped that focussing on these programmes would help soften the impact of Brexit and help them adapt their recruitment. The scheme could also be extended to other programmes if successful.
- 13.3. The scheme also intended to send a message that, post-Brexit, UCL still valued EU students and to provide support for those that might struggle to pay the international fee, in particular those from the Southern and Eastern EU countries. The scheme would use means testing to identify the recipients, based partly on a scheme run by UCL's partners at Sciences Po, Paris. It was suggested that the scheme might also cover other programmes not mentioned in the paper such as from the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES). This would be discussed further with the Joint Faculties' Faculty Tutor.
- 13.4. **Approved** – the UG Fee Bursary Proposal outline in paper 1-09 (20-21), subject to the StRAFC discussion. StRAFC to be kept informed of the scheme's progress.  
**Action – Dr Sonia Virdee, Strategic Planning Integration Director**

### **14. Dates of Next meetings**

- 14.1. The dates of the StRAFC meetings for the rest of the 2020-21 session are:
- Tuesday 9 March 2021
  - Tuesday 8 June 2021

All meetings on MS Teams

Rob Traynor  
StRAFC Secretary  
Policy Adviser (Education Governance)  
Academic Services [telephone 0203 108 8213, UCL extension 582123, email:  
[r.traynor@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:r.traynor@ucl.ac.uk)]

2 February 2021