



Confirmed

## Student Recruitment, Admissions and Funding Committee

9 March 2021

### 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 Arne Hofmann, Mr Kevin King, Ms Katja Lamping, Ms Collette Lux, Ms Bella Malins, Mr Jim Onyemenam, Professor Norbert Pachler, Ms Katy Redfern, Ms Lara Reichle, Dr Hazel Smith and Mr Dean Stokes

In attendance: Dr Rebecca Lindner (Minute 19), Mr Neil Green (Minute 24), Ms Clare Foyle (for Mr Dean Stokes), Mr Alexander Watson (for Dr Elinor Jones) and Mr Rob Traynor (Secretary).

Guests – Mr Dan Derricott (Academic Services, observing the meeting).

Apologies: Professor Stella Bruzzi, Professor Mark Emberton, Dr Elinor Jones, Ms Collette Lux, Mr Ciaran Moynihan, Dr David Sim, Mr Dean Stokes and Professor Nigel Titchener-Hooker.

### Part I: Preliminary Business

#### 15. Minutes of the Last Meeting

15.1. Approved – the Minutes of the previous meeting at StRAFC 2-01 (20-21), held on 8 December 2020 [StRAFC Minutes 1-14, 08.12.2020].

#### 16. Matters Arising from the Minutes

##### 16A Offer making Strategy for 2021 Entry

16A.1 The Director of Access and Admissions provided an update on the progress of the Offer Making strategy which was discussed at the previous meeting (StRAFC Minute 14, 06.02.20).

16A.2 There were concerns with the Government's announcement to revert to Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) and cancel external examinations, which meant that 2020 data only would be used to calculate offer targets. StRAFC had previously agreed that it would be better to use 2017-19 data as the 2020 data was considered too much of an outlier due to the pandemic. There were also concerns that the offer

making figures generated by the modelling of the 2020 data was far less than expected and there was a risk of under exposure if this was used to guide targets.

16A.3 The Senior Management Team (SMT) had suggested that faculties could deviate from offer targets with an uplift of 15% due to the uncertainty in likely student enrolment caused by the pandemic. There was variation with how faculties were using this, with different uplift percentages used for different departments. Further thought was also being given to European Union (EU) students, now classified as Overseas students; as expected, applications had declined.

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

### **17. Admissions Update**

17.1. Received – an update of the 2021 admissions cycle at StRAFC 2-02 (20-21) reported by the Director of Access and Admissions, who noted:

- a) Undergraduate (UG) applications had increased significantly from the UK market (+15.7%) as well as a continuation of increased Overseas applications (+16.8%), which was seen in all faculties. The demographic dip for eighteen-year-olds in the UK had now ended and it was anticipated that numbers would rise significantly in the future.
- b) Offer numbers were lower than last year, as expected following the decision to make less offers due to the overshoot last year and this meant that acceptances also declined. Students had more time to consider their offers as UCAS had pushed back all deadlines for 2021 entry, with the provider deadline now 20 May and deadline for the applicants to reply 10 June. Meaningful intake forecasting would not be possible until after this.
- c) Postgraduate Taught (PGT) applications had increased by 27.3%, compared with last year, representing a 9.6% rise in UK applications and a 29.2% rise in Overseas. However, UK increases were not consistent across faculties with some seeing a decline in numbers. Some of the increase in overall numbers was likely due to the volume of deferred applications from last session, though there was still a large rise in applications.
- d) MRes applications had increased by up to 22.3% on last year (+18.9% increase in UK applications and +23.6% increase in Overseas). There had been a smaller increase in research applications (+2.9%), though a few faculties saw a decrease in both UK and overseas applications. It was noted that it was still early in the cycle, hence the relatively small numbers, though it would need to be carefully monitored.

17.2. It was suggested that as EU UG applications had declined, that thought was given to increasing the number of scholarships to these students to make study more affordable and encourage applications. However, providing scholarships only to EU students was not advised as it could be met with legal challenge. It was also noted that PGT Overseas applications were driven by the Chinese market and that the Admissions team were struggling to keep up with processing the numbers.

- 17.3. PGT offer targets were only available now and there was also uncertainty over the number of deferrals from last year likely to attend UCL in 2021-22. Admissions staff were working with departments with over-subscribed programmes and helping them consider whether to close to applications. It was noted that the Planning Office were reviewing student number planning with a view to better align targets with admissions processes. The Admissions review would also feed into these discussions.
- 17.4. StRAFC will continue to be updated on the admissions data in future meetings.

## **18. Admissions Review – Progress Update**

- 18.1. The Director of Access and Admissions provided an update on the progress of the Admissions Review, which was being conducted by the external agency, PA Consulting.
- 18.2. The review had so far interviewed key staff in Admissions and faculties and had conducted a survey. It was looking at admissions across the piece and considering ways to help deal with the large application numbers, improve efficiencies and the application process. A workshop was being held, the “Art of the Possible”, which explored how technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) might be utilised to analyse applicants’ personal statements, their use of chat box and recognise complex key words. Although more funding would be required, there was potential to help transform Admissions’ capacity to deal with the large application numbers.
- 18.3. The review was scheduled to end at Easter and to provide the Senior Management Team (SMT) with recommendations by the end of April. It was anticipated that the subsequent report would be submitted to the StRAFC June meeting.

## **19. PGR Admissions**

- 19.1. Received – the paper at StRAFC 2-03 (20-21) presented by Professor David Bogle, Pro-Vice-Provost of the UCL Doctoral School and Dr Rebecca Lindner (UCL Doctoral School). This followed on from the report endorsed by StRAFC at the last meeting (StRAFC Minute 6, 08.12.20), which considered structural barriers to doctoral education for students from non-traditional and disadvantaged backgrounds. These students were under-represented in the PGR population.
- 19.2. The report proposed that a series of two-year pilots were held to trial different recruitment approaches for PGR students with Centres for Doctoral Training and Doctoral Training Partnerships. The pilots would aim to address the barriers to the under-represented students by using techniques and approaches which were seen to make improvements in other areas, such as in staff recruitment and for UG students. For example, it was noted that UG contextual offers had doubled the number of students from widening participation backgrounds and a similar, but tailored approach might work if adopted at PGR level. The Doctoral School hoped to encourage wide take-up of the pilots, with at least five or six departments and a

minimum of 150 students. This would ensure that it could be fully evaluated with a large student population.

- 19.3. Possible approaches for the pilots included reporting on personal characteristics data for PGR applications in order to provide better quality data to inform the process. Use of anonymised applications, in particular student names and previous institutions, which could help to address unconscious bias in the selection process and fast-tracking of under-represented students for interview. It was also proposed to provide staff involved in recruitment with cultural literacy training. It was suggested that working with UCL Equality Diversity and Inclusion would be helpful to ensure that the PGR recruitment objectives aligned with wider UCL strategies and practice.
- 19.4. It was noted that there might be some difficulties in changing long-established practices. For instance, many research staff looked to recruit from similar research-intensive institutions whom they trusted to provide students that already had some research experience from their UG and PGT programmes. There was often wariness of recruiting students from non-research-based institutions, whom they might think would require greater academic support and training. There was also a challenge in being able to help struggling students to catch up, with less taught learning opportunities at PGR level. It was suggested that focussing on the PGR “pipeline”, i.e. encouraging the diverse PGT students already at UCL to consider doctoral study, would also help, as well as targeted scholarships and financial help.
- 19.5. **Agreed** – that StRAFC endorsed the proposed pilots and advised the Doctoral School to liaise widely with UCL faculties, the Access and Widening Participation Team in Admissions and the EDI. StRAFC to be kept informed of progress.

## **20. Update on the Use of Agents**

- 20.1. Ms Katja Lamping, Director of Student Recruitment, Communication and Marketing (CAM) provided an update on the use of agents, discussed by StRAFC at the previous meeting (StRAFC Minute 7, 08.12.20).
- 20.2. Following a robust section process with a selection panel including StRAFC members, the global student recruitment agency SI-UK was chosen to work with UCL. The agency had offices in over fifty countries and offered a free service to prospective students and was able to vet their applications for suitable applicants. It was hoped that SI-UK’s large office in Delhi would increase applications from India, as well as help to lessen the reliance on China for Overseas students.
- 20.3. StRAFC will be kept informed on the progress of the recruitment agency.

## **21. Offer Holders Plan**

- 21.1. The Director of Student Recruitment informed StRAFC of upcoming plans for events for offer holders. UG events were scheduled from the end of March to June, with

PGT events scheduled from June to August. The events for overseas offer holders would alternate by region and time zone to provide opportunities for all to engage.

- 21.2. Additional support was being provided by the Visa Team for EU applicants, to help with queries on fees and visa regulations. The sessions were supported by current students and offer holders would also be able to see videos by the current students on a special offer holder website. These would comment on the student experience both pre and post-pandemic. Alumni Relations were also helping to arrange sessions with UCL alumni in several countries during March and April.

## **22. Plans for Undergraduate Open Days**

- 22.1. The Director of Student Recruitment informed StRAFC about plans for the UG Open Days. This included an Open Day website which would be live from 7 June to enable prospective students to sign up for the events. This built on the successful move to online Open Day events which introduced last year, and current students would again be employed as student ambassadors. Sessions planned included academic question and answers, academic presentations and admissions and accommodation information. All the sessions would be recorded and placed on the Open Day website. It was hoped that actual campus visits might be possible in June.

## **23. New Undergraduate UK Presentation**

- 23.1. The Director of Student Recruitment showed StRAFC new slides in development for presentations to prospective UG students. The slides were developed with a marketing agency following consultation and testing with students and staff and were intended to be colourful and in a contemporary style. They would showcase UCL's status as a leading global university, though emphasise its attractiveness for enquiring minds and creative thinkers. The slides had been checked to ensure that any claims were justified and would not fall outside Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance.
- 23.2. The StRAFC discussion revealed broad appreciation for the visual style and content of the slides, though suggestions were made for some specific slides. This included the slide showing UCL's global ranking of tenth place, which raised some qualms by not showing the other institutions above or below UCL. The slide had tried to avoid showing UCL at a mid or lower point in a league table, though it was felt that a global tenth position was a major achievement worth informing potential students.
- 23.3. It was suggested that the phrase "tight-knit community" in one slide be re-considered due to UCL's growth in recent years, both geographically and in terms of student numbers. The slide was intended to refer to the strong feelings of belonging to their departments reported by many students in the consultative work. It was suggested that making this clearer and changing the wording to "close-knit" might help clarify the slide. A slide inviting prospective students to consider if they were the "right fit" for UCL was also questioned. It was felt that students from disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds, perhaps with no history of university attainment in their

families, might find this intimidating. The Access and Widening Participation Team agreed to help CAM work on the messaging for these slides.

- 23.4. StRAFC would continue to be kept informed of the use of the presentation materials and how well they contributed to UCL marketing and recruitment activities.

#### **24. UCAS Data in Tableau – Show and Tell**

- 24.1. The Director of Student Recruitment and Mr Neil Green, Head of International Student Recruitment (CAM) gave a presentation on a new functionality in Tableau, which would enable departments and faculties to see UCAS data on their programmes. This would enable easy identification of competitor institutions at programme and faculty level, help to understand trends (e.g. the propensity of applicants to firmly accept a UCL or competitor offer) and to measure the impact of conversion work done by UCL. It would also help understanding of regional differences in attractiveness of UCL.
- 24.2. CAM was working with the Data and Insight Team to make the pages user-friendly and visually appealing. It was suggested that it would be helpful to be able to cluster programmes into different groupings to enable departments and faculties to better understand how programmes were doing and where more attention was required. It was anticipated that the Tableau pages would be available soon.

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

#### **25. Any Other Business – DAAD Scholarships**

- 25.1. Received – a late paper outlining a proposal for the DAAD Scholarship at StRAFC 2-04 (20-21), introduced by the Director of Student Recruitment. The DAAD was the main German academic exchange body and sponsored high achieving students attending universities in Germany, as well as German students attending universities abroad.
- 25.2. The paper outlined a proposal from the DAAD, sent in a letter to the Provost in January 2021, to engage in more formal funding arrangement with UCL and to seek a limited amount of tuition waivers for scholarship holders from the academic year 2021/2022 onwards. In 2019, UCL had received 22 DAAD sponsored students and the letter also cited other activities such as co-funding of UCL lecturers and academic projects.
- 25.3. StRAFC noted that the DAAD was a prestigious German academic body with a long relationship with UCL. The outcomes of Brexit and the re-classifying of EU students as international students gave an impetus to build on such relationships to ensure that German students were still encouraged to apply to UCL (and vice versa for UCL students to study at German institutions). It was suggested that CAM, Student Funding and the Admissions work together to consider whether a similar agreement

to CONACyT, the Mexican academic body, could be negotiated. This gave a discount of 30% on UCL tuition fees for a set number of students each year.

- 25.4. **Agreed** – that StRAFC endorses the proposal that UCL works with the DAAD and seek to reach an agreement for German student exchange, with a view to negotiating a similar agreement to the CONACyT scheme.

**Action – Ms Katja Lamping, Mr Kevin King and Ms Bella Malins**

## **26. Thanks to Departing Chair**

- 26.1. StRAFC noted that Professor Anthony Smith would be taking on a new role as Vice-Provost (Faculties), as part of changes introduced by the new Provost and President and would step down as the StRAFC Chair. StRAFC will be chaired by Professor Norbert Pachler, Pro-Vice-Provost (Digital Education) and Professor of Education at the Institute of Education.

- 26.2. StRAFC thanked Professor Smith for his excellent service and leadership of the Committee and wished him the best of success for his new role. Members also thanked him for the support and guidance he provided on recruitment and funding matters over the past few years.

## **27. Dates of Next meetings**

- 27.1. The final StRAFC meeting is scheduled for:

- Tuesday 8 June 2021

The meetings will take place on MS Teams

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StRAFC Secretary

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