

**CONFIRMED**

## **Student Recruitment, Admissions and Funding Committee**

**9 December 2019**

### **Minutes**

Present:

Professor Anthony Smith (Chair), Ms Wendy Appleby, Dr Simon Banks, Mr Kris Ilic, Mr Kevin King, Ms Collette Lux, Ms Bella Malins, Ms Angharad Milenkovic, Mr Jim Onyemenam, Ms Katy Redfern, Ms Julie Rolls, Mr Piers Saunders, Ms Ashley Slanina-Davies, Dr David Sim and Professor Olga Thomas.

In attendance: Mr Rob Traynor (Secretary).

Apologies: Professor David Bogle, Fernanda Bowler, Professor Mark Emberton, Dr Julie Evans, Dr Elinor Jones, Professor Mike Munday, Professor Norbert Pachler and Professor Nigel Titchener-Hooker.

### **Part I: Preliminary Business**

#### **1. Constitution and Terms of Reference 2019-20**

1.1. Approved – the terms of reference, constitution and membership for the Student Recruitment, Admissions and Funding Committee (StRAFC) 2019-20 at StRAFC 1-01 (19-20).

1.2. StRAFC welcomed the following new members:

- Mr Kris Ilic, ex officio, Head of MarComms;
- Mr Dean Stokes, ex officio, Director of Planning;
- Ms Ashley Slanina-Davies, ex officio, Education Officer, Students' Union (SU);
- Mr Jim Onyemenam, ex officio, Postgraduate Students' Officer (SU);
- Mr Piers Saunders, appointed, Faculty Education Lead, Institute of Education (IOE);

1.3. It was noted that StRAFC had added an additional term of reference to help ensure UCL compliance with the Office for Students (OfS) Regulatory Framework. This was

to oversee and monitor UCL's compliance with the four OfS conditions now outlined in the Terms of Reference 9:

- A1 – Access and Participation Plan
- C1 – Guidance on consumer protection law
- F1 – Transparency Information
- G1 – Mandatory fee limit.

## **2. Minutes of the Last Meeting**

- 2.1. Approved – the Minutes of the previous meeting at StRAFC 1-02 (19-20), held on 25 June 2019 [StRAFC Minutes 13-23, 25.06.2019].

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

### **3A Ex-Offenders Policy for Prospective and Current Students**

- 3A.1 Noted – that the Ex-Offenders policy was added as [Annex 1.3](#) to Chapter 1: Student Recruitment and Admissions Framework of the Academic Manual, as approved at the last meeting (StRAFC Minute 17, 25.06.2019). The Disclosure and Barring Service had requested that UCL produce this policy in order to ensure regulatory compliance. Education Committee was also informed of this addition.

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

### **4. Admissions Update**

- 4.1. Received – a summary of the 2019 admissions cycle at StRAFC 1-03 (19-20) presented by the Director of Access and Admissions, who reported:
- a) There had been rises across the UK, EU and Overseas categories for undergraduate (UG) applications, offers and acceptances, continuing a trend of year on year rises in the number of UCL applicants. This was most noticeable for Overseas, with a 12.7% increase in applications and 7.9% increase in acceptances. UK applications were up by 4%, with a slight increase in offers and acceptances, whilst EU applications increased (+1%) though offers and acceptances declined by 7.5% and 10.1% respectively. The EU decline in offers was affected by lower intake targets than in the previous year, and with less offers made this then affected the number of EU acceptances. The conversion of offers to firm acceptances data showed that the UK rate had slipped to 41%, whilst there had been 1.5% decline for EU offers, to 51.6% and the Overseas conversion rate had increased by 1.4% to 46.2%. StRAFC was asked to consider why the UK conversion rate was significantly below that for EU and Overseas applications.
  - b) Postgraduate research (PGR) applications increased by 3.7%, following the large increase last session. The number of offers made increased to 4%, with an increase of acceptances by 2.2%. MRes applications continued to increase

(+ 2.3%), though offers and acceptances declined by 3.2% and 9.2% respectively.

- c) Postgraduate Taught (PGT) applications increased by 15.2% and there was again a large increase (+19.8%) for Overseas, a more modest increase for UK (5.2%), but a slight decline in EU (0.7%). The overall increase in Offers (9.4%) and acceptances (7.9%) continued. Conversion of firm acceptances of offers of admissions remained steady for EU and Overseas applications, though there was some decline in the UK figures (-2.2%).
- d) There was a welcome growth in affiliate applications, acceptances and enrolment arising from a significant rise in the number of offers (+10.6%) made to EU and Overseas applicants, which resulted in 6.9% more acceptances. The on-going work to improve the service levels for affiliate applications appeared to be bearing fruit and reversing a declining trend.

4.2. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- a) Admissions were struggling to keep up with Overseas applications on some programmes. There were very high numbers of applications from China, with over 20,000 received already this session and this was exerting huge pressure on resources. Though Admissions was working at maximum efficiency to meet this demand and help departments and faculties, it was very difficult to deal with. High numbers could also affect the student experience on some modules and programmes where there were few students of other nationalities. These students could feel very isolated as Chinese students numerically dominated some lessons, with Mandarin the main language spoken between the students. In terms of over reliance on the Chinese market, UCL was not as over exposed as some universities. However, it was noted that some departments appeared to base their long term recruitment plans on admitting large numbers from China and were not mindful that these numbers would eventually fall, as China intended to be self-reliant in higher education by the mid-2020s.
- b) It was suggested that the challenge was to strike the right balance between student numbers. The long term UCL strategy to diversify markets needed to continue, with more overseas students recruited from India, USA, Singapore and Malaysia. Thought would also need to be given to EU recruitment once Brexit had taken place. Communications and Marketing (CAM) will bring a report to the next meeting outlining these challenges and suggesting possible solutions.
- c) The report also identified the problem of the comparative weakness of UK UG conversion rates in relation to Overseas and EU. It was suggested that UCL should be more proactive in re-engaging with schools and improve visits and relations with Heads of Sixth Forms and focus on influencers. UCL should consider how to recruit more students from the UK regions and note the approach of other London institutions such as Imperial College which had been more successful at this recently. There was also a need within some faculties to focus on subject areas where UCL was less competitive. Whilst it

could expect to lose students to Cambridge and Oxford, it should not be losing out against King's College London and Durham.

- d) It was queried whether there was any correlation between National Student Survey (NSS) scores and numbers of applications, i.e. whether low scores resulted in fewer applications. This was difficult to quantify but it was noted that there was data for the survey of UG students who had accepted offers of admission. This was now in its third year and it was hoped that this data would be available on Tableau.

- 4.3. It was noted that real time UG and PGT admissions data, as well as data on progression and award, was available on the Tableau website run by the UCL Data and Insight Team (contact: [dataandinsight@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:dataandinsight@ucl.ac.uk)): [UCL Tableau site](#). The Director of Access and Admissions would continue to keep StRAFC updated with the latest position on applications and admissions.

## **5. Undergraduate Prospectus Audience Research and the Future of the Hard Copy Prospectus**

- 5.1. Received – the report at StRAFC 1-04 (19-20) presented by the Head of MarComms. StRAFC had discussed the future of the Hard Copy UG Prospectus at its previous meeting and supported the CAM suggestion to conduct further research into this (StRAFC Minute 18, 25.06.2019). The report presented the results of research conducted by CAM and recommendations for further activity to be undertaken.

- 5.2. The Head of MarComms reported the following:

- a) A survey of attendees at the recent UG Open Day was conducted in order to gauge their views on the prospectus and its role in the decision making process. The majority of the 36 respondents were prospective students (83%), with a smaller number of parents and guardians (17%) responding. Respondents were also presented with three potential versions of the printed prospectus, focusing on variations in 'catalogue' content, and were asked to rank them in order of preference. The three versions reduced the content from the current prospectus, by 95%, 75% and then 50%. The content removed was mainly the detailed catalogue content on module information, which the printed prospectus made clear was available online.
- b) The CAM report also listed the results of interviews with key contacts and influencers in UCL feeder schools and sixth forms in the UK (five schools) and internationally (three schools). This was conducted by a Higher Education market research specialist with responses sought on how they used printed and digital prospectuses in influencing their students' university choices. Comments from the survey respondents and the interviews with influencers were also given in the report, providing valuable qualitative data which illuminated the responses.
- c) The UG Open Day survey showed that 50% of the prospective students were still undecided on their university choice at the Open Day, though 83% had

decided on which subject they wished to study. Respondents overwhelmingly preferred online information rather than printed and this was very high in their preference for course module information (89%) and entry requirements (92%). This correlated with the high scores received for module information (92%) and UCAS requirements (83%), when asked which sections of the prospectus that they found most helpful. Only 56% found the section on UCL's history to be helpful in contrast. In ranking the three different possible versions of the prospectus, the 75% reduced version was chosen as first choice by 56% of the respondents. The version closest to the current prospectus was the least popular.

- d) The CAM report concluded that prospective students, their parents and school counsellors chiefly engaged on-line. There was still a place for the printed prospectus, though with detailed course and module information removed as they preferred to access this on-line. The printed version provided a tangible document which was particularly popular with the parents and CAM recommended that this is redeveloped, to complement the on-line information and provide a visually engaging and distinctive overview of UCL. A design agency had been engaged to carry out this work, with a timescale for completion at March 2021.

5.3. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- a) It was suggested that wider research was conducted to gauge views of state schools, in particular those with high numbers of widening participation pupils. Some parents and pupils may have reduced access to the online information and a printed version was thus essential. It was also noted that many overseas students valued the information on life in London and campus facilities, it would be useful to have demographic data, if possible, for on-line traffic on which student groups were accessing this. The information should be available on the prospectus in any case.
- b) A wider issue of managing departmental information for prospective students was also raised, as this was housed on the departments' own websites and might not always be in line with the prospectus or contain still accessible out of date information. It was suggested that these webpages could be managed by faculties, to ensure that the information was consistent with the prospectus and compliant with Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) regulations. This would require some discussion with faculties and it was suggested that it might be considered by the Transforming our Professional Services (TOPS) group, which was working on a pre-application project.

5.4. Agreed: that StRAFC continues to support the approach of CAM in re-designing the printed prospectus and that as part of this work, it also consults and tests the possible versions with a diversity of audiences, as suggested in the StRAFC discussion. StRAFC to be kept updated on progress.

Action: Kris Ilic and CAM Officers

## **6. UCL's Contextual Offer: Additional Assessment Requirement**

- 6.1. Received – the paper at StRAFC 1-05 (19-20) presented by the Deputy Director of Access and Admissions, who reported that the Access and Participation Steering Group (APSG) had recently considered the requirement for an additional assessment. This was part of UCL's contextual admissions scheme for UG students, Access UCL, introduced in 2018-19. APSG recommended that the additional assessment requirement was discontinued and StRAFC was asked to approve this and to consider whether an alternative assessment approach was necessary.
- 6.2. The Deputy Director further reported that an Access UCL offer is up to two grades lower than a standard offer and that in order to meet the conditions of the offer, applicants needed to complete an online study support module and submit a 1,000 word essay. This additional assessment was criticised by the OfS as unfair practice that placed additional strain on pupils in their last year of "A" level study, a view echoed by some schools and UCL colleagues. Anecdotal evidence also suggested that some applicants were put off from applying to UCL by this. The statistics from the first year of the assessment requirement showed that the assessment had no impact on who subsequently came to UCL; twelve of the fourteen applicants who failed it did not achieve their contextual offer grades in any case, whilst the other two performed better than expected with A\* and were then accepted.
- 6.3. StRAFC noted that the climate for contextual offers had changed since the additional assessment was introduced and less concerns of a risk to academic standards were expressed in the public discourse on the matter and in the media. Whilst some Russell Group institutions required assessments, others did not, including notable institutions such as the LSE, Bristol and Warwick, who based their contextual offers on socio-economic and school factors. Members agreed that the UCL assessment was not achieving its intended aim of ensuring standards, as indicated by the lack of effect it had on students who had failed to meet their contextual offer grades. Indeed, the evidence indicated that it was having a detrimental effect on recruitment of students from non-traditional backgrounds and that it would be difficult to make a case to the OfS to retain the assessment, even if that was desired.
- 6.4. Agreed: that the additional assessment requirement be removed from the UCL contextual admissions scheme, Access UCL, with no alternative assessment to be recommended in its place. Access and Admissions officers to enact the changes to the admissions process as necessary

Action: Katy Redfern

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

### **7. Reports of Sub-Groups, Working Groups etc of StRAFC**

- 7.1. Received – the following minutes:

- Consumer Legislation Compliance Operational Group, 1 July 2019 meeting, at StRAFC 1-06 (19-20).

**8. StRAFC Annual Report 2018-19**

- 8.1. Approved – the StRAFC Annual Report 2018-19 at StRAFC 1-07 (19-20). This will now be submitted to Academic Committee.

**9. Dates of Next meetings**

- 9.1. The dates of the StRAFC meetings for the rest of the 2019-20 session are:
- Tuesday 10 March 2020, 10am, Room 604, Institute of Education
  - Tuesday 9 June 2020, 10am, Room 337 David Sacks, Rockefeller Building

Rob Traynor

StRAFC Secretary

Policy Adviser (Education Governance)

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