



## STUDENT RECRUITMENT, ADMISSIONS AND FUNDING COMMITTEE

Monday 23 March 2015

### MINUTES

*PRESENT*

Professor Anthony Smith (Chair)

Ms Wendy Appleby; Mr David Ashton; Dr Jan Axmacher; Professor David Bogle;  
Ms Mariana Ceccotti; Dr Caroline Essex; Dr Julie Evans; Professor Anthony Finkelstein;  
Ms Valerie Hogg; Mr Kevin King; Mr Lukmaan Kolia; Ms Bella Malins; Dr Michael Munday;  
Professor Don Pennington; Dr Yvo Pokern; Ms Katy Redfern; Dr David Stevens;  
Mr Mark Sudbury; Ms Olga Thomas and Professor Jo Wolff

*In attendance:* Ms Julia Dawson, Ms Jenny Moule (for Mrs Houlihan) and Mr Rob Traynor  
(Secretary)

Apologies for absence were received from: Mr Ian Bartlett and Mrs Lori Houlihan

*Key to abbreviations:*

AASG	Access Agreement Steering Group
ARP	Admissions Requirement Panel
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HSBC	Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation
HUSR-T&FG	Home Undergraduate Student Recruitment Task and Finish Group
IoE	Institute of Education
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
PGT	Postgraduate Taught
PGR	Postgraduate Research
SFO	Student Funding Office
SMT	Senior Management Team
SOPG	Scholarships Officers Planning Group
SSFC	Scholarships and Student Funding Committee
StRAC	Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee
StRAFC	Student Recruitment, Admissions and Funding Committee

### 1 CONSTITUTION AND 2014-15 MEMBERSHIP: TERMS OF REFERENCE

***Noted:***

- 1.1 At: StRAFC 1/01 (14-15) the StRAFC constitution and terms of reference.

## **2 MINUTES OF THE FINAL MEETINGS OF StRAC AND SSFC**

### **Confirmed:**

2.1 The Minutes of the final meetings of:

- StRAC held on 10 November 2014 [*StRAC Mins. 1-12, 10.11.14, 2014-15*] and
- SSFC held on 13 November 2014 [*SSFC Mins. 1-13, 13.11.14, 2014-15*].

## **3 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE FINAL StRAC AND SSFC MINUTES**

### **3A Renewal of the HSBC Scholarships Scheme**

*[SSFC Min 9, 13.11.14]*

#### **Noted:**

3A.1 Following discussions at SSFC and subsequent consideration by senior officers, it was decided that UCL should renew its scholarship agreement with HSBC. The scheme will now be aligned with the London Opportunities Scholarship scheme, so that the HSBC funding can contribute to tuition fee costs and UCL will provide maintenance funding. The scheme will continue to fund UK/EU undergraduate students on the basis of financial need.

### **3B Chevening Scholarships – Central Partnership Opportunities**

*[SSFC Min 10, 13.11.14]*

#### **Noted:**

3B.1 Following discussions at SSFC, a new local partnership agreement has been signed between UCL and Chevening, for South Africa. The scheme will provide one full tuition fee scholarship per year (for a three year period) to postgraduate taught students. The discussions around central partnership funding for other countries is still ongoing.

## **4 StRAFC SCHEDULE OF BUSINESS**

### **Noted:**

4.1 Following discussion on the schedule of business for StRAFC, the following was agreed:

- To hold three meetings each session and aside from standing agenda items and urgent matters of business, to have a theme for each meeting.
- The next meeting will focus on marketing and recruitment, in particular the projected figures and possible targets for 2017-18 arising from the academic planning exercise. It would also be useful to compare UCL activities with its competitors.
- The first meeting of the 2015-16 session will focus on scholarships. This will need to be held after December 1<sup>st</sup> 2015 in order to consider Autumn registration figures and scholarship allocation data.

## 5 REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR OF ACCESS AND ADMISSIONS

### **Received:**

- 5.1 At: StRAFC 1/02 (14-15) a report on the current admissions cycle, introduced by the Director of Access and Admissions.

### **Reported:**

- 5.2 The Director of Access and Admissions reported the following:

- *Undergraduate* – The Offer-making stage is over at the end of March and applicants have until the end of May to make their choices:
  - The number of offers made to students increased by 19%, UCL's highest ever in order to address the lower conversion rate in 2014 and the higher intake targets for this year.
  - It is unlikely that UCL will meet the 2015 targets for around half of the departments. Access and Admissions is in discussion with the faculties and departments concerned and where possible targets can be moved between departments to compensate for shortfalls.
  - The overall picture will be clearer in May, but the conversion rate is unlikely to improve much. In order to meet targets, consideration will be required to taking “near miss” applicants or using UCAS Adjustment.
- *Postgraduate Taught* – The admissions cycle is at an early stage:
  - Enquiry numbers through the UCL website have doubled since last year despite concerns that the 9K tuition fee would have a knock-on effect on PGT applications this year. This is likely to have been helped by the re-design of the on-line prospectus.
  - Application numbers are also buoyant. A slight dip in applications from the EU applicants has more than been made up by UK and overseas applications (up by 12.3% and 14.9% respectively).
  - The number of offers is also significantly up on 2014 entry, with all faculties on target so far.
  - Only aggregated data is available for other institutions, but it appears from this and anecdotal information from colleagues elsewhere that Russell Group applications are up, whilst post-1992 HEIs are struggling.
- *Postgraduate Research* – The picture is mixed:
  - Application numbers are down across the majority of faculties for UK, EU and Overseas students. However, many faculties have increased offer numbers which has led to the acceptance rate remaining fairly stable.
  - Changes in admissions practice in the Faculty of Life Sciences had affected the figures somewhat as their numbers of applications, offers and admissions had appeared to dramatically increase this year. The overall figures are not quite as rosy without this, but overall PGR figures tend to even out through the cycle.
  - There are particular concerns for the Faculty of Engineering which has seen a significant decrease in applications and acceptances category. Current figures suggest that it will be challenging to meet the overall targets for UK/EU and Overseas students in this category.

### **Discussion:**

- 5.3 The following points were raised regarding the implications of the data and factors affecting applications:

- Target offers were increased in response to lower conversion rates in 2014 and more intensive competition in the sector for high quality students.
- Undergraduate admissions may be affected by changing national demographics, with fewer 18 year olds in the UK population next year, although numbers will subsequently pick up.
- The graduate loan scheme may have an effect if students decide to wait a year for it to become available. The HEFCE National Scholarship programme, with 363 awards at UCL, might help fill the gap but it is needs based and may not affect overall numbers.
- Overseas applications appear to be holding up, though many subjects are reliant on Chinese applicants. There is a need to spread risk by diversifying into different markets.
- Variations at subject level affects some figures locally, exemplified by growth in Engineering subjects (Chemical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science) and a decline in others (e.g. Electronic and Electrical Engineering) which appear to be linked to national trends.
- Poor National Student Survey scores may also have an impact on applications.
- Data for the Institute of Education is still being worked on, as well as the processes of bringing it in line with UCL admissions processes.

5.4 The following points were discussed in relation to admissions activity:

- Faculties reported that the data and assistance received from Access and Admissions was timely and helpful.
- Faculties are in a difficult position and may transfer offer targets from oversubscribed departments to those struggling to meet theirs, but this needs careful and detailed analysis of the figures to assist their judgement. Some departments doing well had undoubtedly rejected good candidates who may have been made an offer in another department.
- Some informal feedback suggested that UCL is perceived as slow in making offers. However, UCL Select was working well and aside from a small number of individual cases, no problems with delays had been reported, despite the high number of offers made this year.
- Conversion events are being held to keep students warm, including 2-3 in the regions. The Faculty of Life Sciences noted that Webinar events are particularly useful in keeping Overseas students interested.

5.5 The following points were discussed regarding UCL strategy on student numbers and recruitment and on the role of StRAFC:

- It is essential that UCL increases its pool of well qualified applicants and convert them to registrations once offers are made.
- UCL should develop high quality student numbers planning to anticipate and exploit changes in the PGT market. This may expand due to increasing employer expectations on graduate qualifications and the forthcoming student loan scheme, which will enable more students to extend their education.
- UCL is now predominately a postgraduate institution following the merger with the IoE and will be well placed to take advantage of these changes.
- In the context of student recruitment strategy it is the SMT's role to decide on overall student numbers planning. It intends to take tighter control by looking at past data, projections and aligning this with academic planning. StRAFC's role is to consider the strategy for marketing, recruitment and scholarships and to consider the implications of the student number planning on those areas.

- 5.6 StRAFC will continue to monitor and discuss the offers and acceptances data at the next meeting.

## **6 DEPOSITS FOR POSTGRADUATE OFFERS OF ADMISSION**

### ***Reported:***

- 6.1 A note at: StRAFC 1/03 (14-15). The Secretary reported the following:
- Academic Committee had asked SSFC to consider the issue of charging deposits for acceptances of offers of admission for PGT students.
  - SOPG discussed the matter in February and noted:
    - Positive benefits would be that students take offers more seriously with less accepting but then not registering. This should lead to better number planning and programme management. Unreturned deposits from non-registering students would also help cover administrative costs.
    - More negatively, deposits might deter applications from under-represented groups or students from non-traditional backgrounds. There might also be problems for some international students, for example where a deposit was paid but a Visa not subsequently granted, thus preventing the student from registering.
  - Initial research into external practice indicated wide variation in the sector for deposits, with many institutions only charging for Overseas students.
  - Although there would be some resource implications and challenges in aligning UCL's finance systems to allow for deposits, the Institute of Education is using them for international students requiring a Tier 4 visa. Work is thus already underway to adapt the UCL systems to collect these IoE deposits, which could be extended across UCL and be in place for 2016 entry.

### ***Discussion:***

- 6.2 The following points were noted:
- Deposits would need to be high to have any deterrent effect.
  - The Registrar's previous institution, Queen Mary had brought in deposits for Overseas PGT students in order to stabilise offers. The deposits had helped with immigration and Visa processes and the money from "no shows" was not inconsiderable. However, it was not a "magic solution" as initially hoped and problems with number planning still remained, albeit mitigated to an extent.
  - Some members also stated that they were not convinced that deposits would help with problems with volatility in student numbers and unpredictable fluctuations in registrations between years.
  - Anecdotal evidence from external colleagues suggested that policies for charging deposits had to be clear with effective administrative systems. Students had to be sure of the circumstances where deposits are not returned.
  - Students from low income families might be deterred from applying as they may be unable to pay a deposit too far in advance of registration. Some would still be gathering the necessary funds for the tuition fee at that point. Some international students on government scholarships might also not be able to afford to pay it. Consideration would be required for exceptions for such students.

**RESOLVED:**

- 6.3 That a Task and Finish Group is convened to further consider the issues around deposits for PGT offers of admission, along with relevant UCL data and information on practice elsewhere. The Group will report back to the next meeting.

**Action: Wendy Appleby and Rob Traynor**

**7 REPORTS OF SUB-GROUPS, WORKING GROUPS ETC OF StRAFC**

**Noted:**

- 7.1 StRAFC officers have received on behalf of the Committee minutes of the following<sup>1</sup>:

- AASG – 16 October 2014
- SOPG – 12 February 2015

- 7.2 The following updates from the various group members were noted:

- AASG – the group had discussed the UCL Access Agreement following the merger with the IoE. This will be considered by the SMT next month. AASG also noted a visit by the Director of OFFA scheduled for 23 April.
- ARP – will meet in late April and discuss the new “A” levels.
- HUSR – T&FG – the group had finished and had reported to StRAC.
- SOPG – this group which previously reported to SSFC is considered a useful forum by its members and is currently monitoring the implementation of the UCL Scholarships and Student Funding Strategy. The Dean of Engineering Sciences noted that there are problems in recording and identifying students’ sources of funding on Portico and the Head of the SFO agreed to discuss this matter further outside the meeting and if necessary by SOPG.

**Action: Kevin King and Professor Anthony Finkelstein**

**8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Noted:**

- 8.1 A report provided by the Head of Publications and Marketing on the Graduate Study Fair, held in December 2014 is available for information on the StRAFC SharePoint.

**9 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

**Noted:**

- 9.1 The next StRAFC meeting is scheduled for:

- Monday 8 June 2015 – 11am (South Wing Council Room)

Rob Traynor  
StRAFC Secretary

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<sup>1</sup> Available on the StRAFC [SharePoint](#).

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