



STUDENT RECRUITMENT, ADMISSIONS AND FUNDING COMMITTEE

28 November 2016

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Professor Anthony Smith (*Chair*)

Ms Wendy Appleby, Mr Ian Bartlett, Ms Halima Begum, Mr Mark Crawford, Dr Caroline Essex, Dr Julie Evans, Ms Lesley Hayman, Mr Kevin King, Ms Bella Malins, Professor John Mullan, Dr Michael Munday, Professor Norbert Pachler, Ms Katy Redfern, Mr Tom Rowson, Mr Ivan Royle, Dr David Stevens, Ms Olga Thomas,

In attendance: Mr Rob Traynor (Secretary)

Apologies for absence were received from: Professor Mark Emberton, Mr Neil Green, Dr Russell Hitchings, Dr Claire Maxwell, Ms Briony McArdle-Oakley, Dr Yvo Pokern and Professor Nigel Titchener-Hooker,

Key to abbreviations:

| | |
|---------|---|
| CONACyT | National Council for Science and Technology (Mexico) |
| CRM | Customer Relationship Management |
| DARO | Development and Alumni Relations Office |
| GEO | Global Engagement Office |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |
| IOE | Institute of Education |
| PGT | Postgraduate Taught |
| PGR | Postgraduate Research |
| SELCS | School of European Languages, Culture and Society |
| SFO | Student Funding Office |
| SLASH | School of Laws, Arts and Humanities, Social and Historical Sciences and SSEES |
| SMT | Senior Management Team |
| SRM | Student Recruitment Marketing |
| SSEES | School of Eastern European Studies |
| StRAFC | Student Recruitment, Admissions and Funding Committee |
| UCLU | UCL Union |
| UG | Undergraduate |

1 CONSTITUTION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE 2016-17

[PAPER 1-01]

1.1 **Approved** – the constitution, membership and terms of reference of StRAFC.

1.2 The Chair noted and thanked Professor Jo Woolf, Mr Mark Sudbury and Ms Michelle Moore for their contributions to StRAFC.

1.3 The Chair welcomed the following new members to the Committee:

- Ms Halima Begum
- Mr Mark Crawford
- Mr Neil Green
- Ms Briony McArdle-Oakley
- Professor John Mullan
- Mr Ivan Royle

2 MINUTES OF 6 JUNE 2016 MEETING

2.1 **Approved** – the Minutes of the StRAFC meeting held on 6 June 2016 [*StRAFC Minutes 27-38, 2015-16*].

3 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

3A CONACyT Scholarship Agreement and Diversification of Recruitment Markets (*StRAFC Minute 29A, 06.06.16*)

3A.1 The Head of Global Partnerships (GEO) reported that following negotiation with CONACyT (Mexico's Council for promoting science and technology) and then consultation with the faculties, UCL had agreed terms and renewed its partnership agreement. Although not yet formally signed, UCL had agreed to provide a 30% discount for PGR students in all faculties and for PGT students in all but two faculties, Life Science and Medical Science (though its Division of Surgery had signed up).

3B Proposed Working Group on Student Accommodation Allocation and Related Matters (*StRAFC Minute 29C, 06.06.16*)

3B.1 The Registrar reported that the group is yet to meet as evidence it still being gathered. It was noted that a separate Working Group focussing on student accommodation issues is reporting to the Student Experience Committee.

3C Scholarships Strategy Working Group (*StRAFC Minute 31, 06.06.16*)

3C.1 StRAFC had agreed to set up a working group to revise the Scholarships and Student Funding Strategy. The Head of the SFO reported that analysis was underway on a large data set, gathered as part of a Finance Division return, covering scholarships and bursaries offered by academic units. This had also requested data on faculty awards for students. Once the analysis had been conducted, it would be possible for the working group to meet and use it to help inform discussions. The strategy will need to be updated to align with UCL 2034 and other institutional strategies. It was suggested that the Head of Student Recruitment Operations is asked to join the group, as well as academic members of staff. The Secretary will canvass for members soon.

3D Postgraduate Study Open Day

(StRAFC Minute 32, 06.06.16)

3D.1 StRAFC had endorsed the plans to improve and enhance the PG Study Open Day at the previous meeting. The Head of Student Recruitment Media reported that the first new-style event, coordinated with all the faculties, had been held the previous week. This had been very well attended with between 1500-2000 people. Positive initial feedback had been received from the faculties, although there were some teething problems reported with the rooms. A working group had been set up to review the events and to consider ways to make further improvements. StRAFC will be kept updated on progress.

3E The Graduate Experience: Prospectus and Application Portal

(StRAFC Minute 33, 06.06.16)

3E.1 The SRM Director and the Head of Student Recruitment Media had agreed to discuss proposals to improve the application portal processes with the Director of IT for Support Services (ISD) and report back to StRAFC.

3E.2 The SRM Director reported that the Director of IT for Support Services had now left UCL. The StRAFC Chair had been alerted as there was a danger that since responsibility for the new process appeared to fall between Admissions (SRS) and ISD, that funding for the work might not be found. The process would be expensive to set up and involve up to 60 working days to implement. There was general agreement that the improvements to the portal were necessary and should be prioritised.

RESOLVED:

3E.3 That the SRM Director follow-up on the proposal to improve the application portal processes with the relevant ISD officers.

Action: Dr David Stevens

4 BREXIT

(PAPER 1-02)

4.1 The SRM Director reported the following:

- a) The EU referendum result presented a number of challenges to UCL and UK Higher Education. The potential changes to fee status, visa status and access to loans might reduce the number of EU applicants. Competition for students from new and existing markets outside the EU was certain to intensify.
- b) UCL has the highest number of EU students in the UK, though Imperial and LSE have higher numbers proportionally. Applications this year are down by 7.5% on the previous year.
- c) The Provost had convened a Brexit Mitigation Group to consider action that can be taken to address the potential impact of leaving the EU (outlined in Paper 1-02). Smaller faculty and departmental groups, such as the SLASH Brexit Task and Finish Group, had set up to consider

actions on a more local level, though in the context of wider coordinated activity. The latter group was particularly concerned as several of its constituent departments and programmes, including SELCS, SSEES, ESPS and the BASc traditionally recruited high numbers of EU students.

4.2 The following points were noted in the discussion:

- a) Many of the suggested actions highlighted in the paper could also be undertaken at faculty and departmental level, although some coordination with SRM would be required to share resources and information and to avoid duplication.
- b) The challenge presented by Brexit meant that UCL would need to become even more competitive and attractive to students, particularly in relation to its key competitors. Greater emphasis might be placed on UCL's multi-disciplinary environment to help achieve this.
- c) Recruitment operations will need to be enhanced in terms of speeding up application decisions and offers, as well as support on visas. It was noted that the latter might be addressed by current proposals to bring the visa team into SRS. Whilst SRS was continuously reviewing ways to improve application processes, it might be helpful to review practices in departments which presented additional hurdles to applicants, such as setting essay questions for them. This could be deter applicants, particularly where competitor HEIs were not doing the same.

RESOLVED:

4.3 That SRM officers continue with their activities to address the Brexit challenges and liaise as necessary with faculties and departments.

Action: Dr David Stevens

5 ADMISSIONS UPDATE

(PAPER 1-03)

5.1 **Received** – an update on the current admissions cycle by the Director of Access and Admissions, who reported:

- a) UG applications increased by 3.1% compared to 2015, though the acceptance conversion rate continued to decline and more offers had to be made (up by 7.9%). Acceptances rose by 5.1% overall on 2015, though the percentage of UK/EU acceptances to offers continued to decline. Brexit did not appear to have affected EU applications which had risen, though there was a noticeable higher attrition rate for enrolment for EU applicants (5%) than for UK students (1%). This also appears to have affected programmes with greater exposure to the European market in SLASH. The attrition rate for overseas students was also high at 11%.
- b) PGT applications enjoyed a successful year, with numbers increased by the IOE, but still with a 6% increase on 2015 when those figures were removed. Even still, many programmes did not meet their faculty target which suggested that these may have been overly ambitious.

- c) The inclusion of IOE numbers and a change in admission processes in the Faculty of Life Sciences saw an increase in PGR application figures overall. However, this masked a decline across most faculties in applications and offers, a trend which was a cause for concern long-term. The Director of Access and Admissions will discuss this with faculties and the Director of Planning.
- d) UCL was losing its market share for affiliate students with applications continuing to decline by 10% on 2015. Although measures are being put into place, greater resources will be required in the application portal, management of agreements and in customer service in order to address the decline.

5.2 The following points were noted in the discussion:

- a) SLASH faculty figures had declined for PGT, despite UCL's strong overall showing. It was difficult to ascertain the reasons for this, but increases in the fee might have affected these disciplines more as students more carefully weighed up whether to accrue more debt with further study, as well as the impact on their careers. It was possible that fees were at the limits that the market would bear for these programmes. Benchmarking against UCL competitor HEIs was being included in discussions on setting fees. The Director of Access and Admissions will provide more detailed figures to these faculties to help illuminate these issues.
- b) It was also noted that the SMT was not seeking a large increase in student numbers this year. UCL resources were struggling with high student numbers and there was continuing evidence of a negative impact on the student experience from the student feedback received.

6 SMT ALTERNANATIVE ADMISSIONS PROPOSAL (PAPER 1-04)

6.1 The Head of Access reported the following:

- a) UCL is considering ways to increase the numbers of students from under-represented backgrounds and the paper outlines an alternative offer scheme which could help achieve this.
- b) The scheme would consider UG applications meeting the widening participation criteria and use an assessed element to judge the applicants' ability. Offers of up to two grades lower than the standard offer of admission could then be made to suitable applicants.
- c) Other HEIs are already running similar schemes and the scheme may help UCL to improve its recruitment of students from under-represented backgrounds, with up to 400 possible. The Provost is keen on the scheme and views it as a possible way to realise the widening participation objectives in the UCL 2034 Strategy.

6.2 The following points were noted in the discussion:

- a) The Department of History has already run a version of the scheme using successful completion of Summer School assessment as a basis to consider students with lower grades. Research indicated that students from under-represented groups performed well in university and were often highly motivated and able individuals.
- b) Members commented that the proposal for applicants to meet at least two of eligibility criteria outlined in the paper was sensible. However, some suggested a need for consultation with faculties and the student body to address any concerns that the scheme could lower academic standards and to inform staff and students of the aforementioned research on the positive student outcomes. There may also be concerns around how the assessments would be applicable to the subject.
- c) It was noted that the Department of Statistical Science had conducted some analysis of its own students' backgrounds and programme outcomes which supported the findings that students from under-represented backgrounds generally did well. This could be useful in providing a UCL example to support the proposals for the scheme.

RESOLVED:

6.3 That StRAFC approve the proposals outlined in the paper and that the Head of Access inform the SMT of the StRAFC discussion and in particular the suggestions to consult with faculties, departments and students before rolling out the scheme.

Action: Katy Redfern

7 SHARED (FEE CONTRIBUTIONS) SCHOLARSHIPS
(PAPER 1-05)

7.1 This item had been carried over from the previous meeting and the SRM Director and the Head of Student Funding had been advised to discuss the issue of fee discounts raised in the paper (such as CONACyT) with Faculty Deans.

7.2 The SRM Director summarised the rationale for fee discount scholarships and the recruitment context during the discussion, noting that:

- a) Partnerships with overseas government and other bodies achieved greater recruitment outcomes than that offered by HEIs attempting to do so alone. Fee discounts are an important tool in this and enable greater numbers of high quality students to come to UCL. There are also often hidden benefits such as enabling new research partnerships and through the often influential careers of the resulting UCL alumni, which could help UCL in the future.
- b) UCL had become the largest recruiter of overseas students in the UK by taking market share from its competitors. However, this was against the national trend as overseas recruitment had declined overall for the UK as other countries improved their offer. Fewer international students were now coming to the UK and factors such as Brexit meant that

recruitment will become ever more competitive and difficult. UCL would need to maintain and improve on its strategies and tactics for overseas recruitment to retain its position.

- c) There were problems with some departments and faculties opting out of the partnership agreements and this made agreements more difficult (e.g. as in the CONACyT negotiations). There also appeared to be misconceptions in some departments that fee income was being lost due to the discounts, when in fact the larger numbers of students recruited suggested the opposite was true.
- d) It was suggested that anxiety around the fee partnerships focussed on the hard-line stances often taken by the overseas bodies when renewing agreements and requesting greater discounts. A domino effect might also be created which could lead to many more countries adopting the same tactics. It would be helpful for UCL strategies to define the limits the institution would be prepared to consider for partnership agreements. It was noted that the larger or more contentious agreements should be discussed by StRAFC.

RESOLVED:

7.3 **Approved** - Paper 1-05 and the proposals outlined therein, namely:

- i) StRAFC is confirmed as the constituted body to approve the adoption of new fee partnership scholarship agreements and for the renewal of existing agreements.
- ii) There is no mechanism for faculties to opt out of the existing schemes, once approved by StRAFC.
- iii) StRAFC affirms the role of fee partnership scholarship agreements in meeting UCL strategic objectives.

Action: StRAFC members to note

8 STUDENT FUNDING OFFICE ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17
(PAPER 1-06)

8.1 The Head of the SFO introduced the paper and highlighted the key points:

- a) Applications for PGT awards had declined, perhaps due to the introduction of government loans for these students. The SFO was in discussion with DARO to find funding for 50 new awards for UK/EU students.
- b) The Tuition Fee partnership model had grown and will prove important post Brexit in attracting students from non-EU countries. EU students applying for 2017-18 are still eligible for UK government student loans and grants for the duration of their programme.
- c) UCL had been particularly successful with British Chevening Awards. The government awards played to the strengths of UCL and its global outlook.

- 8.2 A query was raised regarding UG scholarships for part-time students. It was noted that the current rules meant that BSci students who intended to go on to the MSci were not eligible as the latter was at Level 7, Masters level. This could impact the numbers of part-time applications. It was noted that part-time student recruitment was not currently a UCL institutional priority and the nearby presence of Birkbeck University tended to attract these students instead. Unless UCL strategy changed, it would not be possible to divert resources into attracting these students through scholarships and bursaries.

9 HOBSONS CONNECT UPDATE

(PAPER 1-07)

- 9.1 StRAFC had been kept updated on the progress of the Hobsons Connect, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system which manages automated communication with prospective students and offer holders. StRAFC had also approved a SRM proposal that the provision of copy/content for subject specific enquirer and offer holder communications in the system should be mandatory.
- 9.2 The SRM Director reported that the subject specific enquirer communications were largely built and being sent to departments. However, there was less coverage of subject specific offer holder e-mails. Work is now under way to develop reports for departments on usage of the system by enquirers and offer holders and to encourage greater departmental engagement. The Chair offered assistance from the Vice-Provost (Education and Student Affairs) officers to encourage this if required.

10 TUITION FEE DEPOSITS FOR POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT STUDY POLICY

(PAPER 1-08)

- 10.1 **Received** - Paper 1-08 showing the policy for the PGT deposits for offers of admission, which had been developed in part by a StRAFC Task and Finish Group in the previous session.

11 StRAFC ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16 TO ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

(PAPER 1-09)

- 11.1 **Approved** – the StRAFC Annual Report 2015-16. This will now be submitted to Academic Committee.

12 REPORTS OF SUB-GROUPS, WORKING GROUPS ETC OF STRAFC

- 12.1 **Received** – The following minutes were received from StRAFC sub-groups and working groups since the previous meeting¹:

- Admissions Requirement Panel – 20 September 2016

¹ Minutes of StRAFC sub-groups etc are available, along with the other StRAFC papers, on the [StRAFC SharePoint](#).

13 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

13.1 The remaining StRAFC meeting dates for 2016-17 are as follows:

9 March 2017 (2pm Haldane Room)

17 May 2017 (2pm Room 337 Rockefeller Building) –*note this date has changed from 1 June 2017*

Rob Traynor
StRAFC Secretary

Quality Assurance Coordinator
Academic Services (Student and Registry Services)
[telephone: 0203 108 8213 internal extension: 58213 email: r.traynor@ucl.ac.uk]

9 January 2017