

The future of the University of London: a discussion paper from the Provost of UCL

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Outline of the issue

1. The Vice-Chancellor of the University of London has issued a consultation paper¹ relating to the future of the federal University. This is a welcome and timely initiative. It is right that the University should regularly take stock of its functions and its performance. The paper raises important questions regarding the needs of the federation and the functioning of the administrative divisions of the University, including the pursuit of greater efficiency and effectiveness. It is running in parallel with three other reviews: of the corporate organisation; of the external programme, and of central student services. The Vice-Chancellor's paper is clear about its terms of reference: the consultation is concerned with ways in which the federal University of London "can be strengthened to the benefit of the Colleges and their staff and students" (para 1).
2. But this approach begs more fundamental questions, including whether the federal University any longer performs a function that is of sufficient value to the Colleges or others to justify its continuation in its present form. To put it in terms common to the fundamental review of any institution:
 - if the University of London did not already exist, would there be a need to invent it?
 - If there would not be such a need, are there nonetheless good reasons why it should be retained?
 - If the institution itself should not be retained, which of its present functions should be retained, and through what alternative institutional arrangements?
 - If the institution should be retained, how far are its functions, governance and funding appropriate to its mission, and what reforms might be appropriate to bring them more closely into line?
 - Should the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Education and Skills (DFES) be invited to initiate a review of the future of the federal University, along these broader lines of inquiry?
3. Given the very significant changes of the past 20 years in the University's role, these are not questions that can any longer be avoided, and the Vice-Chancellor's initiative provides a welcome opportunity for us to address them.
4. There are other good reasons for doing so. Higher education in London, as in the rest of the UK, is going through a period of significant change, with the forthcoming introduction of top-up fees for UK and EU undergraduate students; the increasing globalisation of universities and ever-sharpening competition to attract the most able staff and students from around the world; new mergers and strategic collaborations between universities both national (for example in Manchester) and international; concerns over the closure of formerly leading

¹ *The University of London. The Vice-Chancellor's consultation on the future for the federal University.* February 2005; accessible at www.lon.ac.uk/consultation.

science departments in London and beyond; the new arrangements that are being introduced for funding the full economic cost of research in universities, and a forthcoming research assessment exercise.

5. This paper is intended as a contribution to this wider debate. It is not a formal response by UCL to the Vice-Chancellor's paper, which will follow in due course. Nor has it been approved by the UCL Council. It is a personal contribution, intended to broaden the scope of the debate provoked by the Vice-Chancellor. It employs the same terminology as the Vice-Chancellor's paper in distinguishing between the "federal University", *ie*, the 19 self-governing Colleges and a range of central academic and administrative activities; and the "central University" which is the collective term sometimes used to describe those central activities. These include the School of Advanced Study²; an external degree programme; and various other services³ and student support⁴.

Historical background

6. The foundation of the University followed the controversy surrounding the foundation in 1826 of what is now UCL, and in 1829 of King's College. UCL was founded as the University of London, but it was an independent venture, not only not sponsored by, but actively opposed by the Government of the day. At that time the only universities in England were Oxford and Cambridge, admission to which was restricted to communicant members of the Church of England, thereby excluding all non-conformists, Jews and Catholics. Even many Anglicans were excluded by the social restrictiveness of the two old universities⁵. The vision of the promoters of the new University for London was to provide, in the capital city, an institution whose doors would be open to all.
7. Attempts to secure a Royal Charter for this radical new university were rebuffed by the Tory Government, and the vehicle chosen by its promoters for its foundation was therefore a joint stock company, set up to pursue the objectives set out in a Deed of Settlement. Subscribers bought shares on the promise held out in the prospectus that they would be able to present a student to study at the University at a discounted rate, and that they would be entitled to interest on the value of their share to be paid of surplus income (if any). Public subscription provided the funds for the construction of the main building in Gower Street, designed by Wilkins (who went on to design the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square and many buildings in Cambridge including Downing College and important buildings at King's and Corpus Christi). The College opened its doors to students in 1828.

² This includes the Institutes of Advanced Legal Studies, Classical Studies, Commonwealth Studies, English Studies, Germanic and Romance Studies, Historical Research, Study of the Americas, and the Warburg Institute.

³ The Senate House Library; the University of London Computer Centre; the University of London Institute in Paris; and the Marine Biological Station at Millport.

⁴ The Careers Group; Intercollegiate Halls of Residence; Accommodation Office; University of London Students' Union (ULU).

⁵ See further Negley Harte and John North, *The World of UCL 1828-2004*, UCL Press; 3rd ed 2004.

8. The Church of England fought back. King's College was founded by King George IV and the Duke of Wellington (then Prime Minister) in 1829 as a university college in the tradition of the Church of England. King's opened in 1831. It was inevitable that relations between these two institutions would be strained from the outset.
9. By 1836 the opposition from Cambridge and Oxford to the award of degrees to non-members of the established Church was overcome, and a Royal Charter was granted⁶ to found an entirely new body as the University of London: UCL gave up its claim to this, its original title, taking instead that of University College⁷. The new University of London was empowered to award degrees in Arts, Laws and Medicine to students of both UCL and King's, and any other institutions as might be approved later on. Although it superficially reflected the structure of Oxford and Cambridge in having constituent colleges operating within an overarching University, the reality has always been very different from those two institutions. It was, in the words of one commentator:

“... an umbrella organisation designed to disguise the rivalry between UCL and KCL. It had no premises of its own. Indeed, until 1901 it retained the status of what today would be called a quango.”⁸

10. Throughout the University's subsequent history the role and function of the central University, and its relation with its Colleges, has been the subject of controversy and change. Matthew Arnold argued in 1882 for “the strangely devised and anomalous organisations” of KCL and UCL to be “co-ordered” with the University of London. Mordaunt Crook maintains that:

“[b]y the 1880s UCL and KCL could only agree on one thing: they disapproved of the University of London. So they decided to declare UDI—with or without the medical schools—by drawing an effective line between internal and external students ... To do this they proposed to set up a new university altogether. This institution was to be known first as Albert University, then as Gresham University, then as Westminster University. All three, as Lord Playfair put it, were to leave ‘the London University out in the cold’.”⁹

11. This dispute was to provoke the setting up of no fewer than three studies—two Royal Commissions and a further Privy Council committee—between 1888 and 1891 to review the future of the University of London. None of them arrived at a solution capable of being implemented.
12. Between 1900 and 1966, however, the central University became increasingly powerful. There was a federal degree structure in each subject, presided over by a

⁶ On November 28, 1836. A fresh Royal Charter was granted in 1863, and is the present instrument of incorporation of the University.

⁷ Harte and North *op cit*, p.80.

⁸ J Mordaunt Crook, “The architectural image” in FML Thompson (ed), *The University of London and the World of Learning 1836-1986* The Hamledon Press 1990, p7.

⁹ *Ibid*, 10.

teacher-controlled Board of Studies¹⁰. With the growth of State funding for higher education, the University became the conduit for distribution of grant-funding to the colleges (with the exception of Imperial College, which remained outside the system and was funded directly). Through this period the central University exercised increasing control over the academic mission of the various Colleges and controlled their funding. This was the zenith of the University of London, and it was most strongly symbolised by the construction of the new Senate House in Russell Square in the late 1930s. Here at last was a headquarters building suited to the all-powerful institution that the University had become, generous in its spaciousness, the quality of its materials and the splendour of its finish.

13. The University has also founded many outstanding academic institutes in the course of its history, some of which remain within the School of Advanced Study. Others have since, by mutual agreement become incorporated into one of the Colleges: examples include the Institute of Archaeology and the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, both of which are now within UCL.
14. But the world of the University of London has since changed dramatically. Its former glory has now largely evaporated. With the inexorable growth and development of the Colleges and their emergence as leading universities in their own right, centralised academic control has been steadily relaxed and has now been almost entirely abandoned. The central University no longer assures the quality of the Colleges' teaching programmes in any other than a formal sense: all Colleges are subject directly to audit by the Quality Assurance Agency on the same basis as other universities in the UK. Likewise, the central University no longer prescribes programmes of study or supervises promotions to high academic offices such as professorships.
15. Some subjects are still offered on an inter-collegiate basis, including programmes in History and in Philosophy¹¹, where the combined resources of the collaborating Colleges undoubtedly enrich the opportunities available to students. At the graduate level, the London LLM has long been offered on an inter-collegiate basis, though the LSE has recently withdrawn from the collective and now offers its own LLM programme, and other Colleges are understood to be reviewing their participation.
16. Degrees awarded by the Colleges are formally degrees of the University of London, though this is also now changing: Imperial College has been awarded its own degree-awarding powers, and LSE, UCL and other Colleges are currently going through the approvals process. The last formal constitutional barrier to their being recognised as full universities in their own right will then have been cleared.
17. Perhaps more importantly, no College today relies upon the University for its funding. Until 1993 the funding for all Colleges other than Imperial College (which already had direct funding) was transferred from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to the University as block grant, which

¹⁰ See further Thompson's introduction, *ibid*, xv.

¹¹ A common undergraduate programme is offered by Birkbeck, Heythrop, King's and UCL.

was then allocated by the University to the constituent Colleges according to its own formulae. For the period 1990-93 their approach was to take as their starting point the Funding Council's allocation for each College, before making a deduction for the University's central costs.

18. Since 1993 the financial flow has been reversed: block grant funding goes directly to the Colleges, and similarly to the University of London for its own teaching and research activities; and the Colleges then contribute to the other costs of the University. There are two principal forms of contribution: a levy in respect of services provided for each College, which is calculated in accordance with criteria such as levels of usage or volume of students; and a federal subscription, which is calculated by reference to income. The figures for UCL are set out in Table 1 of Appendix 3, and the income and expenditure of the University of London is set out in Table 2. The tables disclose that UCL contributes £2.27 million of the University's total receipts from subscriptions and charges of £8.75 million.

The current role of the University

19. The main rationale today of the federal University is as a combination of the central University and 19 Colleges, whose common feature is their location within or adjacent to the Greater London area. Each College is self-governing and autonomous. Each has its own governing body, and its own Head of College who is accountable to that governing body. There is no accountability to the federal University for the conduct of any College's affairs.
20. True, there are varying levels of dependence upon the University in terms of services and "the brand" of the University of London; dependence is predictably higher among the smaller Colleges. But the federation also includes several university institutions that are world-renowned in their own right, and for whom the existence of the University of London tends to be a source more of confusion than of strength. Imperial College, King's College, the LSE and UCL are all in the small group of leading universities in the UK and with Cambridge and Oxford are sometimes referred to as "the Golden Triangle". So too Royal Holloway College, which claims its place amongst the top 10 universities in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise.
21. Likewise, the London Business School is ranked fifth in the world in the Financial Time's league table, and many others, though smaller in size, have distinctive missions and specialisations which attract international respect: for example, Birkbeck College, the Royal Veterinary College, the School of Oriental and African Studies, and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.
22. There are different spatial connections with the central University. Several Colleges are based alongside one another in Bloomsbury, and by reason of their physical co-location with the University are better able than the other Colleges to make use of facilities like the Senate House library and the University of London Union building (ULU), for both of which they pay a special subscription reflecting their level of usage.
23. It is worth exploring in some detail what the University's key roles are today:

- (1) As a degree-awarding institution;
- (2) As owner and landlord of extensive estate, particularly in Bloomsbury;
- (3) As the holder of a “brand” that provides support for smaller Colleges, particularly in their being able to market their degrees and programmes as being of the University of London;
- (4) As the provider of services, including the Library, careers and accommodation;
- (5) As an administrator of inter-college activity;
- (6) As the administrator of the external programme;
- (7) The central academic activities.

(1) a degree-awarding institution

24. All degrees awarded by the Colleges, including Honorary Degrees, are degrees of the University of London. At one time they were awarded in composite ceremonies conducted by the University of London, and presided over by the Chancellor. But today each College conducts its own degree ceremonies. These arrangements are unusual and possibly unique¹². Other universities in the UK, even the newest, have powers to award their own degrees. Under arrangements now prescribed by the Department for Education and Skills (DFES), such powers may be conferred upon Colleges of the University of London following a formal auditing process. Imperial College has them already (as indeed did the Royal College of Music during its period as a member of the University), though has not yet exercised them; other Colleges can be expected also to have them conferred in due course.
25. The Colleges will also be entitled to petition the Privy Council for the award of the title of “University”. This prospect raises a constitutional conundrum for the University of London, which has already arisen in relation to interest expressed by other universities in London in joining the federal University. It is possible for one university to be a constituent College of another university? In principle it should not be if that threatened its own autonomy. In practice, membership of the federal University does not do so; the Colleges are not subordinate to the University. Indeed, given the current funding arrangements, the relationship is if anything the other way round.

(2) owner of estate

26. The University owns significant estate, particularly in Bloomsbury. Much of this is occupied by the central University, including Senate House and various buildings in Russell Square, Gordon Square, Tavistock Square, Torrington Square, Woburn Square and elsewhere in Bloomsbury. With the recent vacation

¹² The closest parallel is with the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, but in both universities the programmes of study, the examinations and the degree ceremonies are all organised by the University, though the degree ceremonies are commonly presided over by the respective Heads of Colleges.

by Edexcel plc of Stewart House immediately adjacent to Senate House, the University is currently relocating activity there from outlying buildings, and offering up several of those buildings for purchase (on 99-year leases) and occupation by Colleges. The University is the freehold owner of much of the estate occupied by the Bloomsbury Colleges, although some, including UCL, own the freehold of the majority of their estate. It is also the owner of the various student halls of residence.

27. The terms on which the Colleges occupy University property appear to be somewhat varied. In the case of the properties recently offered up, the University proposes a standard 99-year lease at a market premium, with a user clause restricting occupation to educational purposes.
28. The University's most recent accounts show that the net book value of the estate (including halls of residence) as at July 2004 stood at £85.460 million, made up of £49.941 million in respect of freehold properties, £0.346 million for long leaseholds; £1,326 million short leasehold and £30.217 million in respect of refurbishment. Certain freehold properties with a net book value of £32.124 million have been charged as security for long term borrowing.
29. The University's concentration of ownership of Bloomsbury estate offers remarkable opportunities for improved common facilities and landscaping. The Senate House is the central focal point. Although it is a monumental building of its era, and is protected, as a Grade II listed building, from significant changes to its appearance or character, it offers real opportunities for new uses, not least in relation to the unfinished North-East wing. So too the University-owned public spaces running through Bloomsbury where the fragmentation of ownership and occupation between the University and the Colleges has led to unfortunate inefficiencies, duplications and lost opportunities in the use of valuable assets.

(3) a brand providing support for smaller institutions

30. This is perhaps a role more passive than active. The "brand" may indeed be, as the Vice-Chancellor's consultation paper claims, internationally strong. But there is also a paradox in this claim. Its strength results, as his paper maintains, "from the exemplary standards and collective achievements of the Colleges and the central academic activities" (para 22). In other words, the brand is primarily the Colleges themselves. Yet, "the University of London brand is believed by many Colleges to be one of the federation's most valuable assets, particularly in terms of international recruitment" (para 24).
31. This vision of a reputational collective, in which all Colleges seek to share in the glory of all other Colleges, is less than convincing, especially in an era when the federal University no longer has the function of securing or enhancing the quality of what goes on in the Colleges. Without that safeguard, the brand appears to be an empty claim. Other universities in or adjacent to London appear to have little difficulty in advancing standards and recruiting international students without the support of the University's brand. The larger Colleges commonly make no mention at all of the University of London when promoting their own brands.

32. Moreover, there is a mismatch between the University's functions and the promotion by it of the brand "on behalf of Colleges" as the consultation paper proposes, and a tension between that function and the competitive character of the Colleges in promoting their own brands.

(4) a provider of services

33. This is indeed an important role. Take, for example, the University Library in the Senate House. It has been continuously and actively developed since the 1870s although its history goes back as far as 1838. Its holdings amount to some 2 million titles and are concentrated primarily across the wider Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, though it provides basic reference tools in science and medicine and maintains significant collections in the History and Philosophy of Science, Technology and Medicine. About 5,500 current periodical titles are received.

34. The library is an important resource to scholarship across London, and indeed internationally, but particularly to the co-located Bloomsbury Colleges where its benefits are reflected in the subscriptions levied upon them. It is extensively used by students, including by undergraduates. The Bloomsbury Colleges in particular are locked-in to usage of the University Library, having diverted a significant proportion of their library spend into it over many years, at the expense of developing their own collections more fully.

35. The Library's importance is enhanced by the proximity of the British Library in Euston Road, although that is neither a borrowing library nor is it generally open to undergraduates. Whatever happens to the University of London, maintaining this collection, and access to it, must be an important objective.

36. Careers and accommodation are also important services, though not all Colleges subscribe to them, and the subscribing Colleges continue to keep their options under review.

(5) administrator of inter-college activity

37. Collaboration between the Colleges, and with the central academic institutions, is indeed extensive as a recent report¹³ discloses. Teaching collaboration has a long history, although it is not apparent that this activity requires a separate University to co-ordinate College activity on this front, and the Vice-Chancellor's paper notes a perception that there has been a retreat from, and some diminution of cross-College collaboration on this front since 1994.

38. Research collaboration is in a different category. It owes little or nothing to the inter-mediation of the federal University, and everything to the intellectual curiosity of the principal investigators and the research strategies of their collaborating institutions. There are many more research collaborations between Colleges and universities around the globe than there are between the Colleges. And although there are some powerful current major inter-College initiatives – for

¹³ University of London, *Adding value through collaboration* (2004).

example the London Centre for Nanotechnology established between Imperial College and UCL – they have no relation to the federal University.

(6) the external programme

39. This is a large enterprise which has presently 32,000 enrolled students. It is an area of great potential, and the University's current arrangements are presently under review. Its administrative organisation rests with the central University, but the academic functions are fulfilled by lead Colleges appointed for each subject area.

(7) the central academic activities

40. The central institutes include the Institutes of Advanced Legal Studies, Classical Studies, Commonwealth Studies, English Studies, Germanic and Romance Studies, Historical Research, Study of the Americas, and the Warburg Institute, grouped together in the School of Advanced Study. They are all national resources, and are funded as such by the HEFCE. They are the academic wing of the central University; indeed, they are its entire academic raison d'être as an institution separate from the Colleges. They are not however intellectually isolated. They benefit from a range of intellectual collaborations, including with their close Bloomsbury College neighbours; that interaction appears to be valued highly by the Colleges that participate in it.
41. The School of Advanced Study is currently under review by the HEFCE, in a study being undertaken by Sir Martin Harris. An important question will be how this activity sits within the central University, and its operational relationship with the Colleges.

Current governance arrangements

42. That brings us to the governance arrangements. How well-suited are they to the University's current role as outlined above? The University's autonomy derives from its power to make its own statutes, which are conferred by the University of London Act 1994. The University's Statutes, made in 1994 in accordance with the Act, have since been twice revised, and are supplemented by Ordinances.
43. The purpose of the University is defined by the Statutes, clause 3(1), as follows:

“The purposes of the University are, for the public benefit, to encourage, organise, improve and extend education of a university standard; and to this end to grant degrees and other awards; to promote the advancement of knowledge and learning by teaching and research; and to monitor and maintain the highest academic standards.”
44. The statutes provide for the University to be governed by a Council, which is chaired by the Pro-Chancellor and includes representation of the Colleges and other interests. Its academic governance is through a Senate.
45. Although it has only a skeletal academic function, the University's governance structure remains that of a large and active university. It has a Chancellor

(currently the Princess Royal), a Chairman and Pro-Chancellor (currently Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville), a Vice-Chancellor, a Deputy Vice-Chancellor, a Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Medicine and such other Pro-Vice-Chancellors as may be appointed by the Council. The Council's membership includes, in addition to the officers and the Heads of Colleges, 20 elected academic members, 5 student members including the ULU president, and 25 appointed members. There is also, as demonstrated by Appendix 4 to the Vice-Chancellor's consultation paper, an extensive structure of no fewer than 29 committees, further reinforced by unspecified numbers of subject area boards and research degree committees.

46. This is a conventional structure that might well have been appropriate to the role and conception of the University 40 years ago, but it is not apparent that it has kept pace with the significant changes that have occurred either in the role of the central University, or indeed in the governance of universities more generally. It is noteworthy that it is only in the last year that the committee of the Heads of Colleges has become a formal committee of the University.
47. Although it is widely accepted that the strengths of the University and its brand are primarily those of the Colleges, this is not at all reflected in the governance arrangements. The federal University is not a self-governing members' co-operative, advancing the Colleges' collective interests and accountable directly to the Colleges. It maintains instead the style of a wholly separate and self-sustaining University, in whose governance the Colleges are offered a contributory role.

External trends in HE

48. How does the federal University fit into the broader scene of UK universities? Higher education in the UK is changing rapidly. There is a continuing drive to achieve greater efficiency and improved use of resources. The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) has already had a powerful impact on focusing research excellence in UK universities, particularly by concentrating funding on the highest ranked departments, ie those awarded the grade of 5 and 5*, and by withdrawing funding from other departments. It is likely that the forthcoming exercise, in 2008, will continue that trend so that, despite the Government's commitment to increased total investment in science research, the full funding will be spread between a relatively small number of departments in each discipline.
49. Table 3 in Appendix 3 below sets out the results of the Colleges in the last RAE. The 2008 exercise will have a different scoring system: units of assessment will be awarded a more complex "quality profile" in place of the simple grades conferred under previous exercises. It is not possible at this stage to assess what will be the shape of the funding profile that will follow, but the exercise carries high risks for the financial health of university departments, and indeed entire institutions, that fail to achieve a quality profile towards the higher end.
50. It is unlikely that the map of higher education in London in ten years time will remain significantly unchanged from today. London has 41 institutions of higher

education altogether, including many post-92 universities. They are represented politically by a collective, London Higher (formerly known as LHEC), but have still a long way to go in achieving the collective impact on regional politics that their counterparts have achieved in Scotland and in many of the regions of England, especially the North West and the North East. The Chancellor's recent pre-budget statement, and its commitment to the "science cities" programmes for Manchester, York and Newcastle, symbolises the different dynamic in those regions.

51. Higher education in London comes across by comparison as diverse and divided, and historically politically ineffective, though London Higher is starting to raise profile on this front. The University of London as a federal institution of 19 of the 41 institutions lacks both the capacity and the legitimacy to play the leadership role that its name suggests. London institutions would be unwise to ignore the recent merger between UMIST and the University of Manchester: this must act as a stimulus to thinking of what comparable opportunities might exist for London.

Possible future models

52. There are several alternative visions for the future of the University in addition to that advanced by the Vice-Chancellor. His consultation paper assumes that radical change is unnecessary and that some review and improvement of the existing arrangements will best meet the needs for the future of the members of the federation. But a wider range of options needs to be considered, including:
 - (1) The status quo;
 - (2) A reconfiguration of the central University;
 - (3) Dissolution of the University and distribution of its functions and assets;
 - (4) Radical institutional resettlement for higher education London.

(1) the status quo

53. This is the model assumed in the Vice-Chancellor's paper. It needs to be assessed in terms of the benefits it brings to higher education in the UK, as well to the Colleges and the central academic activities, by comparison with other possible configurations considered further below. There is a real risk that a continuation of the status quo will amount to a decision to continue the steady process of decline of real functions and influence, whilst maintaining a top-heavy system of governance and expensive infrastructure. Colleges will recognise that developing the federal University into a more active and effective organisation will require a reversal of that trend, and to cede greater autonomy to it. This however will require the University to develop further the confidence of the Colleges, and is unlikely to emerge as a preference without a more responsive and accountable system of governance.

54. But continuance of the status quo would not:

- (1) inhibit further mergers and amalgamations between institutions within the University of London, nor indeed with institutions presently outside it.

The reform of the hospital medical schools and their integration with leading London universities over the past 20 years has already significantly changed the face of medical education and research in London, creating a new league of internationally outstanding medical schools. But if this process leads, as it seems to have in the past, to the mutual strengthening of the merging institutions, it threatens to further weaken the case for retaining the federal structure in its present form;

- (2) prevent changes in membership of Colleges. Some may wish to leave; others to remain; some will feel locked in by virtue of their sunk costs; other London universities may wish to join. These processes could in themselves wholly change the membership and hence the character of the federal University over time;
- (3) leave the present allocation of functions intact. Colleges will always seek ways to improve the handling of functions, either by the University or themselves individually or jointly.

(2) reconfiguration of functions and governance

55. Do the present functions warrant the current shape of the University? Could all or some of them be more readily and more cost-effectively undertaken by one or more lead Colleges; or by collectives of those Colleges most interested in them?
56. As outlined above, the governance of the University of London remains largely unchanged from an era when it had a powerful controlling function over the Colleges, to today's reality where its mission is to support the Colleges (see the Mission Statement at Appendix 2). Although the Mission Statement is clear about the University's role in supporting the Colleges, and although the present Vice-Chancellor brings a welcome open and positive approach to his duties, this is simply not an institution that is run by the Colleges for the Colleges. Rather, it has its own independent, and self-sustaining existence.

(3) dissolution and redistribution of functions and assets

57. This option presents the starker alternative to maintaining the status quo. It would involve the dissolution of the central University. Its separate institutes and activities might then continue as one or more independent institutions, though they would more likely find a home with one of the Colleges.
58. The Colleges would become full universities in their own right, with degree-awarding powers (subject to the usual procedures), and with such collaboration between them – academic and otherwise – as they think appropriate.
59. The University's net assets might be distributed between the former members according to a formula to be determined, but based perhaps upon variables such as volume of subscription and length of membership. A major challenge with this option would be with the future of the University Library. Those Colleges that presently make extensive use of it, and indeed have contributed significantly over the years to the development of the collection, will wish to have continued access

to it. Splitting the collection up and distributing it between the Colleges would be clearly unsatisfactory.

60. So too with the student halls of residence, which are an asset shared by the Colleges. This collectivity could be continued by transferring the relevant assets to a management structure reflecting College interests.
61. That leads to the issue of the future use of Senate House. Its use has always been as a University building, and it would offer an opportunity for continuing use for this purpose. Its most likely ongoing function would be as the home to a major library, it could be sold in the open market, or vacant floors could be disposed of; but if this were to occur without it being possible for it to be acquired by one or more of the Bloomsbury Colleges would be to lose one of the most visible and recognisable physical symbols of university presence in London.

(4) a radical resettlement

62. This option could have a number of variants. If the objective is to develop some truly world-class university institutions for London, this could be achieved by a series of strategic collaborations, which are matters entirely for the Colleges themselves; or by bringing together different universities or colleges into single institutions. Or it could involve a process of simultaneous dissolution of more than one institution and their re-establishment as a single new foundation.
63. Lessons need to be learnt from studying organisational models in other urban areas: for example, the institutional collaborative relationship between Harvard and MIT at Cambridge Massachusetts; or the reorganisation of the universities in Paris.
64. It is imperative that London university institutions think hard about such an opportunity. Heads and governing bodies will be faced with growing demands in coming years to be more strategic about their primary focus, and are already being forced to shut down or reorganise departments which are no longer attracting students of sufficient calibre, or failing to perform sufficiently strongly in research. Size and diversity do not guarantee a future free from such choices, but the range of choice tends to be greater in a larger and more diverse institution.
65. This is not the place to spell out the many possible options. It is possible to do no more than identify some of the approaches deserving further consideration. One, for example, would build upon the existing clusters of College activity, perhaps by promoting four powerful research-intensive University quadrants in London, around the LSE and King's; around Imperial; around Queen Mary; and at Bloomsbury. To achieve such an outcome requires a very long-term view. The merger discussions between Imperial and UCL in 2002 prompted some consideration of such an approach, but under conditions that were not conducive to their success.
66. An alternative future model can be examined by taking just one of the quadrants. In Bloomsbury, a potentially powerful model would involve combining the various Bloomsbury Colleges together with the University of London to create a new unitary University. The advantages would be primarily academic. It would

draw together in London the strengths of a major world-class university. It would also effect significant efficiencies and economies, particularly in the deployment of the Bloomsbury estate and in back-office functions. There would be a united single administration; single responsibility for student recruitment, admissions and welfare; a single student union and a single budget. It would draw together into a single institution a student population that presently exceeds 24,000 full-time and 19,000 part-time students (see Table 4 in Appendix 3).

67. This reform would result in a well-balanced institution across the board by consolidating existing strengths in arts and humanities, alongside biological and medical research; together with the strengths of the co-located internationally renowned hospitals, including the new UCL Hospital in Gower Street and the specialist hospitals at Great Ormond Street and Queen Square. Libraries could be better utilised across the campus and general collections brought together in a single location; lecture rooms and seminar rooms more efficiently deployed and serviced on a cross-campus system; high-quality conference facilities provided; and proper staff and student facilities developed, including more effective use of the ULU building.
68. It would be important to ensure, however, that this was a refoundation rather than a takeover: the new institution would not be simply a new federation, but a single institution with new leadership, a single Council, and, in due course, a unified approach to academic programmes, career structures and governance arrangements.
69. Central to it would be to maintain and capitalise upon the key institutional strengths of the present Colleges. Two examples may suffice. One could envisage a structure in which Birkbeck's mission remained as it is, but now built upon the world-leading research departments that Birkbeck could not reasonably expect to maintain on its own, but which could be created by bringing together existing departments (some of which already co-operate closely). So too with SOAS, where the complete Bloomsbury combination of area studies, cultural studies and languages would be truly unique.
70. The effect of this model would be to break up the existing federal structure, but it would not necessarily destroy the advantages that other Colleges derive from the University. For example, it would be important to maintain access for members of other Colleges to a new central library. Most of the other Colleges are in any event sufficiently strong in terms of their international reputation not to rely at all upon the University of London either for support or for branding.
71. It might be appropriate, however, for there to be some form of capital distribution to all existing Colleges upon the break-up of the federation, and the accounting basis on which this would be based would require special consideration. That would be a matter for special review, conducted by or on behalf of the HEFCE, and alongside consideration of the resources – from the HEFCE, the Government, the London Development Agency and other contributors – that would be needed to carry through the necessary structural changes and underpin the new institutions.

Conclusions

72. The Vice-Chancellor's consultation provides an opportunity for some long-term thinking about the future of the University of London. This paper argues that it should not be simply assumed that the present role and structure of the University is the best model for higher education in the UK or in London. The powerful functions the University once exercised have today largely evaporated, and the Colleges have become the real engines of its academic activity. Yet neither its governance structures nor its administrative arrangements exhibit any reflection of this fundamental change.
73. The future of the University of London and of higher education in London is a matter of national and international importance. This issue deserves to play a central part in the debate the Vice-Chancellor has launched, and this paper is intended to extend the scope of that debate accordingly.
74. In considering the questions posed by the Vice-Chancellor, respondents are invited also to consider the questions raised in this paper, in particular those set out in the opening paragraphs:
 - (1) if the University of London did not already exist, would there be a need to invent it?
 - (2) If there would not be such a need, are there nonetheless good reasons why it should be retained?
 - (3) If the institution itself should not be retained, which of its present functions should be retained, and through what alternative institutional arrangements?
 - (4) If the institution should be retained, how far are its functions, governance and funding appropriate to its mission, and what reforms might be appropriate to bring them more closely into line?
 - (5) Should the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Education and Skills (DFES) be invited to initiate a review of the future of the federal University, along these broader lines of inquiry?

Appendix 1: Activities of the University of London

Constituent Colleges

Birkbeck
Courtauld Institute of Art
Goldsmiths College
Heythrop College
Imperial College London
Institute of Cancer Research
Institute of Education
King's College London
London Business School
LSE
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Queen Mary
Royal Academy of Music
Royal Holloway College
Royal Veterinary College
St George's Hospital Medical School
School of Oriental and African Studies
School of Pharmacy
University College London

Central institutes

British Institute in Paris
University Marine Biological Station, Millport

School of Advanced Study

Institute of Advanced Legal Studies
Institute of Classical Studies
Institute of Commonwealth Studies
Institute of English Studies
Institute of Germanic Studies
Institute of Historical Research
Institute of Latin American Studies
Institute of Romance Studies
Institute of United States Studies
The Philosophy Programme
Warburg Institute

Central activities

Central Administrative and Support Services
External Programme

Intercollegiate Halls of Residence

Kent, Surrey, Sussex Department of Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education

London Department of Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education

Student Accommodation and Property Management Office

University of London Careers Service

University of London Computer Centre

University of London Library

University of London Union

Appendix 2: Mission Statement of the University of London

The University of London, as one of the leading universities in Europe, through its Colleges and central Institutes provides an unrivalled range of higher education opportunities of outstanding breadth and quality and engages in world-class research. The University is mindful of its historic and pioneering role in extending university education to those prevented at the time by their religion or their sex from gaining access to higher education, in offering educational opportunities to many who would not otherwise have been able to take university degrees, and in developing university institutions in the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth.

THE UNIVERSITY:

- is committed to undergraduate and postgraduate teaching in a research environment, which draws on many different traditions, practices and methods in a wide variety of institutions, offering unsurpassed opportunities to students from all countries who are able to benefit from its courses so that they attain the highest academic standards and develop to the most exacting intellectual level;
- is dedicated to the prosecution of research across all fields of study at the highest international standards;
- seeks to contribute to the public welfare in the work of its graduates and its staff and in the results of its research, enriching and advancing culture, education, the humanities and social sciences, the performing and creative arts, science, engineering, technology, medicine and public affairs;
- by its significant presence in London seeks to make a major contribution to the economic, scientific and cultural life of the metropolis;
- seeks to represent nationally and internationally the highest standards and enduring values of the university tradition, including academic freedom, intellectual integrity and equality.

Appendix 3: tables

Table 1: UCL annual subscription to the University of London 2004-05

Services	2004-05
Library	437,556
Institute of Advanced Legal Studies	96,922
University Theses and Archives	28,302
Union	300,841
LLM Co-ordinator	29,993
Careers Service	415,641
Exams and Registry	123,900
MCQ exams	11,040
Accommodation Office	72,917
Rates	27,495
Insurance	16,670
Federal Subscription	633,200
Accommodation for UCL Careers Service	72,180
TOTAL	2,266,657

Table 2: UoL income and expenditure summary 2003-04 (£000)

Income	
HEFCE grants	10,505
Academic fees	2,758
Research grants and contracts	2,397
Other operating income	60,583
Colleges: subscriptions and charges	8,746
Residences and catering	13,800
Estates revenue	3,106
Other general income	13,998
External programme fees	20,087
Examination services for Colleges	749
Deferred capital grants	97
Total	60,583
Other Services Rendered	19,471
Endowment and Investment Income	3,742
	99,456
Expenditure	
Staff Costs	- 43,963
Other operating expenses	- 52,291
Depreciation	- 2,646
Interest	- 1,121
	-100,021
Operating deficit	
Exceptional Items	- 565
	3,127
Surplus	
Surplus retained in/deficit funded by	2,562
University of London	2,591
Subsidiary	- 29

Source: University of London: Central Institutes and Activities. Financial Report and Accounts for the year to 3 July 2004

Table 3: RAE 2001 Results by College

Institutions	Numbers of Units of Assessment by Rating							Total Numbers
	1	2	3b	3a	4	5	5*	
Constituent Colleges								
Birkbeck	-	-	2	3	4	9	3	21
Courtauld Institute of Art	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Goldsmiths College	-	-	2	3	7	4	2	18
Heythrop College	No submission							
Imperial College London	-	-	-	-	2	7	13	22
Institute of Cancer Research	-	-	-	1	-	3	2	6
Institute of Education	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
King's College London	-	-	-	2	11	14	10	37
London Business School	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
LSE	-	-	-	-	1	5	7	13
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2
Queen Mary	1	-	-	4	6	13	3	27
Royal Academy of Music	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Royal Holloway					5	10	4	19
Royal Veterinary College	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
St George's Hospital Medical School	-	-	-	3	3	1	-	7
School of Oriental and African Studies	-	-	-	2	2	6	1	11
School of Pharmacy	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
University College London	-	-	-	2	6	24	16	48
Central Institutes								
British Institute in Paris	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
University Marine Biological Station, Millport	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
School of Advanced Study								
Institute of Advanced Legal Studies	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Institute of Classical Studies	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Institute of Commonwealth Studies	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Institute of English Studies	No submission							
Institute of Germanic Studies	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Institute of Historical Research	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Institute of Latin American Studies	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Institute of Romance Studies	No submission							
Institute of United States Studies	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
The Philosophy Programme	No submission							
Warburg Institute	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1

Table 4: Student numbers (UG-PG across Bloomsbury colleges) 2002-03

	UG-FT	UG-PT	PG-FT	PG-PT	UG TOT	PG TOT
Birkbeck	13	17,922	862	3,333	17,935	4,195
Institute of Education	7	108	1,780	3,677	115	5,457
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	-	-	585	271	-	856
Royal Veterinary College	807	13	132	83	820	215
School of Oriental and African Studies	1,969	23	1,093	381	1,992	1,474
School of Pharmacy	655	-	117	277	655	394
University College London	11,482	332	4,541	2,541	11,814	7,082
Central University Institutes and Activities	89	0	177	142	89	319
External programmes						32,000