**2022 – 2027
Strategic plan**

Introduction: Vision, Mission and values

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Discussion
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25 October 2021

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Part one:
Our Vision and Mission

As we approach the 200th anniversary of the establishment of UCL, it is extraordinary to see how deeply imprinted is its founding purpose. The university was to be in and of London and, like our great city, both open to all the world, and concerned at least as much with 'useful knowledge' as with 'polite learning'.

While the founders of the university may not have dreamed of its current size, reach, or global standing, the ethos of their work has proved resilient over these two centuries.

Not surprisingly, therefore, that ethos also informs the Vision and Mission that the university set out as a part of its long-term strategy, *UCL 2034:*

Vision

Our distinctive approach to research, education and innovation will further inspire our community of staff, students and partners to transform how the world is understood, how knowledge is created and shared and the way that global problems are solved.

Mission

London's Global University: a diverse intellectual community, engaged with the wider world and committed to changing it for the better; recognised for our radical and critical thinking and its widespread influence; with an outstanding ability to integrate our education, research, innovation and enterprise for the long-term benefit of humanity.

As we come to write a strategic plan for the next five years of the university's life, 2022 – 2027, we build on this overarching Vision and Mission and the ethos that informs them. In particular, three themes of our Vision and Mission should guide us.

First, our Vision and Mission are shot through with a conception of partnership for change. The university implied in them is one where work entails collaboration between staff, students and stakeholder communities; where education, research, innovation and enterprise are held together; and where the disciplines are brought together around the solution of 'global problems'. A test of the success of any strategy in this university should be whether it has assisted in lowering the barriers to this kind of partnership, for people both outside and inside the institution.

Second, core to our Vision and Mission is a notion of change 'for the better'. This is at the heart of our traditional commitment to 'useful knowledge'. The purpose of a UCL strategy is to see the work of our staff and students have impact in the 'wider world … for the better', not merely to maintain or improve rankings, build academic reputation or financial sustainability. To affirm this commitment to 'useful knowledge' is not to deny a place for the value, or joy, of discovery for its own sake. There will always be a central place at UCL for staff and students whose research has no immediate application to bringing change. But UCL does have a strong tradition of impact, and that tradition is more valuable than ever at a time when the world faces immediate and potentially existential threats, and the social licence to operate of British universities is arguably under question. A commitment to 'useful knowledge' has informed our recent work on the 'Grand Challenges', and it is hoped in this strategic period to build upon that work by focusing on particular global problems and opportunities.

Third, though this theme is more implicit, there is a sense in which the Vision and Mission entail a commitment, as a university, to be fit to bring change. Neither partnership for change, nor change for the better, can be achieved unless a university really has the dynamic and flexible spirit

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that is evident all through these statements. The institution must be internally and externally open and accessible, so that identifying and working with potential partners is relatively easy; it must be capable of coordinating activity across the departments and faculties to focus on global problems and opportunities; and it must direct its resources primarily at its work in education, research and engagement, and not become entangled in the complexities of its own institutional life. While the work of UCL undoubtedly lives up to the first and second of these three themes in our Vision and Mission, there is evidence that we have some way to go in fully expressing the third.

In short, these themes may be seen to reflect a shared purpose for the work of UCL, and one that partly reflects our Benthamite foundation. It is that together we advance human flourishing through building knowledge and understanding.

The remainder of Part One of this discussion paper attempts to capture the values that hold us together as a community. It is a truism that 'culture eats strategy for breakfast', and while the forces that create and maintain a culture are complex, it must to some extent be shaped by the values that a community shares, enacts and celebrates. The values set out here are arguably essential to achieving the Vision, the Mission and the purpose that we have set ourselves, but they will only be useful in shaping the way we work if they have resonance in our community. They are therefore offered as a jumping off point for a broader conversation about what our values are and should be: members of the UCL community are invited to comment both on whether the values outlined in this paper are those that we should articulate in our next strategy, and on their implications for any aspect of our life together.

Part Two of this discussion paper outlines the proposed elements of our Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027, elements that we believe reflect these themes in our Vision and Mission and support our shared purpose. It also explains the phasing of our strategic consultation through a series of seven discussion papers culminating in a draft strategic plan.

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Our values

If our Vision and Mission emphasise partnership for change, change for the better, and fitness to bring change, then the values that have emerged in our initial conversations with the university community look, not surprisingly, to the quality of our work and of our relationships.

Our values and academic freedom

Before turning to consider these clusters of values, however, it is worth pausing to consider the ways in which they relate to our overarching commitment, as a university in the liberal tradition, to maintaining and promoting academic freedom. That concept is central to our identity as an institution

Of course, academic freedom is a concept that resists easy definition. Eric Barendt has pointed out that most statements of academic freedom involve ideas about the freedom of individual researchers and teachers; ideas about institutional autonomy; and ideas about academic participation in institutional governance. But he goes on to admit that '[i]t is not particularly helpful to attempt a single definition of academic freedom' and that '[d]oubts are expressed not only in respect of borderline claims [of academic freedom], as with freedom of speech or personal privacy, but with regard to its central meaning'.[1]

But the one thing that all understandings of academic freedom have in common, and that must be maintained as a hallmark of the life of UCL, is a strong bias towards maximising the autonomy of the researcher and teacher to determine, to pursue, and to promote their own intellectual agenda, and to do so free of unwarranted institutional or government interference.   A commitment to academic freedom in this sense is the ground bass against which our shared values sound; that is, our values express, amongst other things, a shared commitment to the ways in which we will exercise our academic freedom.

Integrity and mutual accountability

The first of the four clusters of values necessary to support partnership and collaboration relates to personal and corporate integrity; being honest and transparent in our dealings with one another and the broader community. This entails a strong sense of collective and personal responsibility and accountability to each other, and to the communities that we serve. These values of integrity and responsibility are a necessary precondition to effective partnership because it is only possible to work with those whose engagement is honest and whose decisions are taken on a principled basis. It is suggested that for this cluster of values we might adopt the shorthand of *integrity and mutual accountability.*

Two implications of this concept of integrity and mutual accountability merit particular attention. The first is that it should be clear in relation to any university initiative where a decision has been taken in the institution, by whom it has been taken and on what basis, and who is responsible for its implementation. The recent Academic Board *Commission of Inquiry* report suggested that this has not always been the case at UCL, and subsequent reforms both to our governance and management decision-making processes have been designed to improve mutual accountability. But there is no doubt that we have a way to go on this score.

The second is a commitment to a particular mode of engagement with one another and with our partner organisations. Universities have a history of promising extraordinary things to the communities with whom they work: it is essential that we are absolutely clear with staff, students, alumni, donors, and external organisations about what we can and cannot deliver as an organisation of limited resources and competing priorities, even when pressure exists to deliver the impossible. The demands on universities are growing, and we must be able to say with clarity both what we can, and what we cannot, achieve.

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1   Barendt, E., *Academic Freedom and the Law: A Comparative Study Oxford: Hart 2010 at 16 - 17*

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Openness and inclusion

A second cluster of values speaks to the internal culture that creates effective partnerships with as broad a range of stakeholders as we have. To collaborate effectively, we must both individually and collectively be open to, and engage with, the 'other', however that other is conceived. Internally, our community must be diverse in the many senses of that term. It must not merely be diverse as a matter of toleration, but actively looking to welcome and include a wide variety of individuals and groups fully as members. Too many groups of staff and students at UCL have experienced, and continue to experience, a kind of marginalisation that should have no place in our community. Externally, we must demonstrate a certain 'outward' orientation, and a commitment to engagement on terms that recognise the needs and aspirations of the partner community or organisation. We must be a community in which our partners, too, have a sense of inclusion. Whether involving a commitment to diversity internally, or to engagement externally, this cluster of values entails a certain epistemic humility in which it is taken for granted that we can learn from others, and that if we do, our work will have more impact in bringing change for the better. It is suggested that for this cluster of values we might adopt the shorthand of *openness and inclusion*.

The implications of this commitment to openness and inclusion are rich and varied, but three should be highlighted. The first is the absolute priority of ensuring that our staff and student body (not least our academic and professional leadership group) is as diverse as possible. Drawing from all the available pools of talent and a diversity of leadership will improve our work, will help us better to engage with the communities that we serve, and will go some small way to address issues of historic injustice both inside and outside the institution. During the period of our next strategy, we must make significant and measurable progress on this front.

A second implication of our commitment to this value is a duty to promote equality, both within and without the UCL community. While concepts of equality are themselves contested, it must be the case that a community striving to be open and inclusive values the equality of its members and partners. This means, for example, that all students of equivalent ability should be equally able to succeed, and that the so-called 'awarding gap' for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students must finally be removed. It means, too, that the institution should build with urgency on our efforts to eliminate discriminatory pay gaps. In these, and

many other, practical ways, the university should be one of which genuine equality of opportunity and treatment is a hallmark.

The third implication of our commitment to openness and inclusion is that we should keenly protect methodological and ideological pluralism. To some extent that pluralism is supported by our commitment to academic freedom, but we should be particularly alive to protecting the freedom of those with minority or unpopular approaches or perspectives. We should also guard against the 'groupthink' that can take hold in intellectual communities. A university diverse on various measures, yet marked by a certain intellectual homogeneity, is arguably one failing fully to garner the rich benefits of a commitment to openness and inclusion.

Care and respect

A third cluster of values that has emerged in our initial conversations concerns the way in which we treat one another within the university as members of a community with a shared focus on bringing change for the better. In this cluster, concepts of respect and parity of esteem have been raised. Universities have traditionally often been highly status-stratified by function, so that researchers have been accorded a higher status to teachers, and academic staff to professional staff. UCL has put considerable effort in recent years into recognising the contribution of teaching-focussed staff as people who discharge one of our two core functions and whose expertise is profoundly important to the success of the institution. The question of the parity of academic and professional staff has been slightly more complex. UCL is an academic institution, and it is right that its direction of travel in teaching and research should ultimately be determined by the academic community. That is why the Academic Board has a crucial role in advising Council on the academic life of the university. But the university would be unable to achieve its academic mission without the contribution of its professional staff, who must enjoy a parity of esteem for the vital contribution that they make to our success. They must be accorded respect and parity of esteem for their professional skills, just as academic staff are for theirs.

Importantly, in preliminary feedback on our proposed values, there has been a concern that in this third cluster we move beyond mere respect and parity of esteem to a more proactive ethos of care. This has all sorts of potential implications for leadership and for policy in the institution, as it requires a commitment to seeing one another

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flourish, a commitment consistent with our desire to see change for the better. This commitment to care has been to a large extent evident at all levels of the institution in the way in which staff and students have looked after one another during the COVID-19 pandemic. As we come out of the pandemic, it will be important to think through what its implications might be for the more routine life of the university. It is suggested that for this third cluster of values we might adopt the shorthand of *care and respect*.

One important implication of this commitment to care and respect becomes particularly crucial given our commitment to integrity on the one hand, and to openness and inclusion on the other. Any strong academic community will be a place in which ideas are contested, and in which disagreements emerge, not only about methodology and ideology, but also about the best direction for the institution, both strategically and operationally. The more genuinely open and inclusive an academic community is, the more likely it is that these disagreements will happen and be heated. In this context, learning to disagree in a way that honours our commitments to integrity, care and respect becomes essential. As David Schlosberg points out, even political and social theorists strongly within the traditions of agonism highlight 'the need for an ethic of agonistic respect across difference'.[2] Chantal Mouffe, for example, writes of an ideal in which 'the 'other' is no longer seen as an enemy to be destroyed, but as … somebody with whose ideas we are going to struggle but whose right to defend those ideas we will not put into question'.[3] Care and respect in this context involve attention to the epistemic virtues; at the very least those of listening, of communicating in a way commensurate with the goal of increasing understanding, and of identifying with precision those points on which both disagreement and agreement exist without attempting to demonise the other. This 'disagreeing well' should be hallmark of our life together which we guard, and into which we induct our students.

Rigour and innovation

Finally, a fourth cluster of values relates not to how we engage with one another or with our stakeholder communities, but to how we approach our core work in teaching and research as one of the most highly ranked universities in the world. Our work will only have impact if we engage and if we reduce the barriers to cooperation. But it will also only have impact if it is of the highest quality. One particular challenge here is in the balance of work addressing

the complex problems of our communities, which is almost always cross-discplinary or multi-disciplinary, and work within particular disciplinary traditions. Disciplinary communities guard and develop methodologies that have been demonstrated to have real epistemic power, and bringing their insights to multi-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary problems requires a careful attention to new methodologies for solution-focussed work. To bring change for the better, a university needs both very strong disciplinary communities and a deep commitment to multi-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary work (which work, symbiotically, challenges and transforms the disciplines over time). In each case, the key is rigour in defining questions that can realistically be addressed, marshalling evidence required to answer them and, in the solution-focussed space, an openness to innovation. This combination of *rigour and innovation* is critical, and those two terms provide an appropriate shorthand for this cluster of values.

The four clusters of value that seem to be emerging as important for our work are thus:

• Integrity and mutual accountability

• Openness and inclusion

• Care and respect

• Rigour and innovation

Each has implications for our culture, for leadership, for our policies and our strategy, and each is inevitably to a greater or lesser degree currently evident in our collective life. It is important, therefore, that the whole UCL community discusses these values to determine whether they ring true to our shared commitments, what the implications of each might be, and whether a slightly different list might have greater resonance with our various communities, both internal and external. Consultation around this discussion paper will be directed at those questions.

2   Schlosberg, D., "The Pluralist Imagination" in John Dryzek, Anne Philips and Bonnie Honig (eds)
     Oxford *Handbook of Political Theory* Oxford: OUP 2006 142 at 150.
3   Mouffe, C., "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?" (1999) 66 *Social Research* 745 at 755

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Part two
The 2022 – 2027 Strategic Plan consultation

Consultation for our 2022 – 2027 Strategic Plan will happen in three phases.

The first consists in the discussion of this paper, especially as regards our Vision, Mission and values, and the background paper *UCL Now*. This will give members of the UCL community, broadly conceived, the opportunity to reflect on our current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and on the kind of institution that we would like to be.

A second phase of consultation will involve the discussion of three papers, each concerned with different areas of potential investment during the next five years, and each proposing a suite of performance indicators to measure the success of that investment. In these papers the criteria used for identifying areas of potential investment at the institution-wide level, rather than within a particular faculty or department, would be that the activity is one that requires institution-level coordination or scale of investment, and that the investment, even if within a particular disciplinary area, would pay institution-level dividends in terms of the quality or reputation of our work in education or research.

The first paper in this second phase, *Grand Challenges*[4], will make the case that the university ought to draw together its work in a small number of key thematic areas of pressing importance for the institution itself, for London, for the UK (and in particular its healthcare system), and for the wider world. This programme would specifically draw on the tradition of the 'Grand Challenges'. But it would involve a more comprehensive structure both for drawing our work together and engaging with communities beyond the university so that we come to be known as a 'go-to' place for solutions in these areas. The implications of each for our own operational life as a university, for our engagement with London, with the UK and with international partners will be teased out. Mechanisms for the ongoing support, or retiring, of these initiatives after

the period of the Strategic Plan will also form a part of the proposal.

The second paper, *Areas of Disciplinary Focus*, will make a case for strategic investment in particular areas of our work over the next five years. This is not new to UCL. The university has, for example, made strategic investments in recent years to firmly establish its place in neuroscience. But what may be new is that we will identify a range of areas for short-term strategic investment and develop a suite of performance indicators against which the success of that investment can be measured.

The third paper, *Education Priorities and Programmes*, will consider our current approach to education and student life, both in terms of the aspirations that we set ourselves in the strategy *UCL 2034*, our Vision and Mission, and the situation of UK higher education after the experience of the pandemic. In thinking through our work inside and outside the classroom, a key question will be the extent to which a UCL education equips our students to work in partnership with others, and to be agents of change for the better. These are attributes that we believe are consistent with the UCL ethos, but also that reflect those employers increasingly find important. The scope of this paper will not merely be our educational offerings narrowly conceived, but the rich palette of the whole student experience.

A third phase of consultation will build upon responses to the first two phases. A sixth consultation paper, *Enablers*, will bring together estates, technology and other professional services plans to respond to the academic priorities identified in Phase Two of the consultation. It will propose a co-ordinated approach to student and staff experience; a blueprint for simplifying our processes and making us more agile; and outline plans for how we adapt the professional services organisational model to achieve these ends and be less hampered by our own internal complexities. This will be designed to ensure that as much of

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4   Each of these consultation paper titles is at best a current working title

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the energy and time of an academic is devoted to her work in teaching and research, and as little to administration, as might be possible. It will also propose a new mechanism for the allocation of resources and costs within the institution, with a financial framework and strategy that enable delivery.

A seventh consultation paper, *UCL Size and Shape*, will consider the ideal size and shape of our student body, both academically, and in terms of the revenue that will be required to sustain the university into the future. As the companion paper *UCL Now* demonstrates, the university has seen significant growth in student numbers and complexity over the past two decades: we have almost certainly arrived at a point at which we need to take stock and consider our direction of travel in student number planning.

For each of these discussion papers, an initial conversation will be held with Council to gain insights into its collective response to the direction of travel, and then extensive consultation will take place with Academic Board, with the whole UCL community, and with key external stakeholders including partners and government. We will then coordinate a draft Strategic Plan for release and comment, responding to the issues raised during the consultation process. The aim will be to have, ready for implementation in 2022, a final strategic plan and an accompanying financial and student number plan that will take us through the following five years and, to some extent, beyond. At each stage, the key questions will be: for any given initiative, whether it builds upon the global standing, strengthens the financial resilience, and reflects the distinctive ethos of UCL; and, for the plan as a whole, how far it moves us towards the institution implied by our Vision and Mission and firmly built upon our values.