

TRANSFORMING OUR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES



UCL

TRANSFORMING OUR EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES – PRINCIPLES AND EMERGING IDEAS

The Service Leadership Team for this review is made up of Wendy Appleby (Academic Registrar), Clare Goudy (Director of Education Planning) and Donna Williamson (Faculty Manager, MAPS).

Success in subject-level TEF and our ability to continue to recruit the best students depends on the capacity of our departments and faculties to provide an outstanding student experience. Experience in other universities suggest that this requires an efficient and effective education administration in which individual staff and students are supported by wider networks and work consistently.

Our emerging ideas for Education Administration and Student Support could equip us to effect local change to improve the student experience. We want to prioritise effective connections across departments, faculties and central professional services, underpinned by consistent systems and processes, to build the capacity for sustained improvements on our current position.

Reflecting the commitments in Principal Theme 2 and Enabler A1 of UCL2034, this emerging model draws on existing UCL best practice and is aligned closely with academic leadership roles to ensure consistent, professional and people-orientated support for staff and students. Ideally, every student would have a single point of contact in their department for academic and welfare support. All teaching staff could be supported in their work by administrators with the workload capacity, training and systems to manage programmes efficiently and effectively. Faculties could have greater scope to take decisions and manage their own administration, through clear delegated authority. There could be new faculty specialists for key functions, such as timetabling and quality assurance, which require co-ordination between local teams and central services. Capacity for education planning and strategic enhancement projects could also be increased, facilitating timely responses to NSS and PTES data and supporting the introduction of subject-level TEF.

Central professional services teams could support faculty and departmental staff with guidelines and frameworks for education administration and student support, deliver training to support teams based locally, and ensure UCL's compliance with external regulation.

1. We have heard from a large number of colleagues regarding the issues they are facing. These include:

Despite the best efforts of our staff, our students do not think our current approach to the organisation and management of their programmes is working. Satisfaction with organisation and management saw a drop in the 2017 NSS from 77% to 63%. Recent Cubane data also indicate that staff at UCL are generally more dissatisfied with student administration than at competitor institutions, and significantly more dissatisfied with student support. To understand better what lies behind these headlines, our Service Leadership team engaged extensively across UCL, with a 42-strong design team including representatives from every faculty and professional services division. Over 300 colleagues and 250 students contributed their ideas for change through events and online forums. In consultation, we identified the following key drivers for change:

Student experience

- UCL needs to ensure its professional services support the needs of students today and in the future. These have changed greatly in recent years, as has UCL, with mental health high on the agenda
- Students tell us they want to have a 'first point of contact' who can support them with problems and work proactively to help them access opportunities outside the taught curriculum
- Most of all, many students say that they do not feel welcome at UCL and do not identify closely with us.

People

- Staff and students alike find UCL complex and increasingly difficult to navigate. Students find it hard to access timely information about services and support; most importantly students need to feel welcomed and a valued part of the UCL community

- The models for education administration in faculty departments have evolved ad hoc. Staff team sizes and roles vary considerably across the institution, resulting in workload inequalities and opaque lines of accountability and responsibility. Central teams lack consistent points of contact to support faculty and department colleagues, and vice versa
- Staff teams in departments and faculties are typically overloaded, without the capacity to co-ordinate change projects.

Systems and processes

- Our processes have not been overhauled for many years and are no longer fit for purpose
- Portico is currently not structured to reflect the scale and complexity of the institution. There are multiple local workarounds for processes and duplicated layers of approval which create delays and inefficiencies and frustrate students and staff
- UCL has some way to go to meet the planned Data Futures and GDPR requirements
- We are not yet rigorous enough when assessing the operational requirements of new programmes and the operational implications of new policies.

2. Overview of the principles and emerging ideas

The key principles and emerging ideas are:

- We could **ensure that we build capacity in three key areas of activity**, covering student support, lifecycle and programme administration and governance and strategy. All roles in departments should have counterparts in faculties and in SRS and OVPESA teams
- We could introduce **teams of student advisers, embedded in academic departments**, working alongside personal tutors, who would become a dedicated point of contact for students. They could be trained to deal with students responsively and to refer them to the correct specialist service where needed. First-line mental health support could also be provided through these advisers. In addition, they could work proactively to promote the range of co-curricular opportunities at UCL, so that our students can make the most of their time with us and be ambassadors in the future
- We could conduct a **major programme of process re-design**, to include timetabling, module selection, all panel-based processes, programme approval, student record keeping and admissions
- **Faculties could take on greater ownership of the management of education administration**, by co-ordinating **programme administration and student support teams which are deployed physically within departments**, and by managing their own approvals for many processes. More specialist activities (e.g. timetabling, record keeping, quality assurance / academic standards and education planning) could be resourced more intensively at faculty level to grow capacity, and ensure these are driven by local needs and contexts
- **We should continue to invest in the Academic Model Project** and, additionally, in industry-standard tools for managing questions from students, casework, booking appointments, capturing records of interactions, and in managing student feedback.

We could seek to extrapolate the best of UCL's practice across the board, resulting in consistent and coherent approaches to administration that result in fair workloads for staff and a consistent experience for students. We have real heroes amongst staff in departments supporting academics and students, but we cannot ask them to manage workloads which are way beyond heroic. Instead, we need to provide fulfilling roles with improved career pathways. The student adviser role, in particular, could be modelled on the very best examples of UCL professional staff performing advisory roles, notably leading to stronger NSS scores. When we have tested these ideas with students, they have been welcomed: 'I feel that I would have someone to go to when I don't want to trouble my tutor who is very busy'; 'it could really help us move forward with the mental health support agenda'; 'that would be great'. When we have tested these ideas with current teaching administrators, many said, 'that's the job I'd love to do but I just have too much administration to do'.

3. What would potentially change?

In practice, the emerging ideas may mean:

- **Staff roles in departments could be aligned to one of two functional areas, according to needs in departments/divisions.** For example, a faculty could establish two principal role types in departments: programme administrator and student advisor. Programme administrators could support programme directors to deliver efficient and effective teaching. Student advisors could be the 'go-to' person at department level for all students, helping them to feel connected to the university, and to navigate processes and systems. However configured, any programme administration or student support teams would be physically located in departments, with oversight and management co-ordinated by the faculty. This could enable departments to address student concerns about belonging and efficient administration, and staff concerns about workloads and career pathways. Such roles of student adviser and programme administrator could be equally effective in a PGR context
- **Staff roles in faculties could be aligned to more specialist areas, according to need and context:** faculties could be empowered to manage their own education administration, removing layers of approval and increasing efficiency. We could have new teams for more specialist activities that require expert knowledge of systems, regulations or processes, and for the co-ordination of academic governance and planning functions. Faculty staff could manage activities such as timetabling, quality assurance, examination boards; student record-keeping (as super-users) and education planning and enhancement activity, in consultation with departments and in partnership with central teams. These teams could be led by Faculty Directors of Education and Student Experience. This could make our processes more efficient and responsive to local context, and build capacity for key strategic processes, such as subject-level TEF, GDPR, data futures and planning
- **Staff aligned to our needs in central teams:** SRS staff could provide frameworks for systems and processes (e.g. student record keeping, quality assurance) to make processes simpler. They could also deliver services that require institutional co-ordination (e.g. examinations), that operate at programme level (e.g. admissions, enrolment and awards processing) and activities that support external compliance (e.g. Tier 4, HESA returns). They could provide specialist services such as disability support. SRS staff could work closely with faculty staff to provide training and support to staff in departments, and could play a leadership role in Communities of Practice. A new Staff Service Desk in SRS could provide staff in faculties and departments with direct access to support. The OVPESA team (including the Arena Centre) could work closely with staff in faculties to support strategic planning and to facilitate education enhancement projects
- **Make basic tasks easy:** transactional, simple processes that are repeated time and again across UCL could be brought together centrally. There is an opportunity to better manage peaks and troughs and deliver these processes through a new service model. This would accelerate and facilitate consistency and harmonisation, and offer significant improvement opportunities for transactional services to make them work more efficiently and effectively. These processes could include:
 - the printing and despatch of some documentation such as certification of enrolment, transcripts, degree certification and student status letters,
 - processing (hard copy) student feedback forms, some student funding payments processes;
 - a new SRS staff-facing helpdesk.
- **Money for systems:** high-performing systems are key to effective and efficient working processes. We suggest significant investment in our IT systems, particularly in the student information system (Portico) and systems to support student feedback. This has already begun with the Academic Model project. This system could be the single 'source of truth' about our taught programmes, and could move us away from the significant duplication and double handling that currently exists
- **Make processes simpler:** processes could be revised to make best use of the capacity of this new system. We also suggest we introduce tools, now standard across the HE sector, to capture records of interactions with students and allow timely referral to specialist support services, such as SPS and SDS. Such tools also give students greater opportunity to 'self-serve' for core processes, freeing up staff time to work with students with more complex needs.

4. What would not change?

There are a number of areas which are not covered by the emerging ideas and would not change. In particular, there will still be support staff physically located next to academics and students. We consider that these roles must remain situated within departments. It is vital that the proposed structure reinforces the departmental home for students, helping them feel they have somewhere they 'belong' at UCL, and that teaching staff in departments have access to consistent administration teams.

5. The benefits and investment we are making

The following table details the benefits we are aiming to achieve within the Education Administration and Student Support Services service, as well as the investments we need to make in order to realise these benefits.

Benefits	Costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater support for efficient programme delivery, facilitating significant improvements in NSS scores and TEF• A personal support service for students, responding to their concerns about 'belonging' in a large institution, facilitating significant improvements in NSS / PTES• Well-functioning, standardised processes reduce inefficiencies caused by local workarounds• A single source of truth for student records• A connected education administration and student support services and end to end processes/services• Clear and consistent job roles across departments, improving our ability to support department staff with high-quality training• Improved capacity in faculties to tackle complex administrative challenges, such as timetabling and student records management• Improved capacity in faculties to support strategic planning for education enhancement and to respond to the challenges of subject-level TEF• Workload relief for professional services and academic staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Investment in systems over 1-3 years, building on the work of the academic model project and enhance significantly the user experience of SITS

6. What are the outstanding questions we would welcome feedback on?

1. Do you consider that our ideas will facilitate greater collaboration and co-operation across departmental, faculty and central teams? Why / why not?
2. Does the concept of three functional areas of focus – programme administration; student administration; planning and governance – feel right to you?
3. Do you support the principle of making programme administration roles distinct from student advisor roles? Why / why not?
4. How can we foster greater consistency and collaboration in this area whilst still ensuring that faculties are able to configure teams which reflect the contexts in which they operate, and the needs of particular disciplines?
5. Do you agree that we should prioritise continued, significant investment in Portico and other associated systems?

Disclaimer:

These documents contain emerging ideas for how UCL professional services could be delivered in a more effective way in the future. At present, no formal change proposals are being put forward by UCL and so engagement remains at an informal stage. Where a preferred option is mentioned, this pertains to PA Consulting recommendations and does not constitute a formal proposal for change by UCL.