



Education Committee

1 February 2024

Minutes (Confirmed)

Present:

Professor Kathleen Armour (Chair)

Ms Beatrice Addo; Ms Karen Barnard; Professor Parama Chaudhury; Mr Shaban Chaudhury; Ms Sarah Cows; Professor Sally Day; Dr Julie Evans; Mr Daniel Farrell; Mr Matteo Fumagalli; Ms Marie Gallagher; Ms June Hedges; Professor Arne Hofmann; Mr Ahmad Ismail; Professor Liz Jones; Dr Rachel King; Dr Sandra Leaton-Gray; Mr Zak Liddell; Ms Blathnaid Mahony; Dr Jennifer McGowan; Dr Abel Nyamapfene; Professor Norbert Pachler; Professor Paola Pedarzani; Professor Mary Richardson; Professor Aeli Roberts; Mr Mike Rowson; Professor Bill Sillar; Dr Hazel Smith; Professor Jakob Stougaard Nielsen; Dr Francesca Scott; Dr Fiona Strawbridge; Professor Olga Thomas; Dr Nalini Vittal; Dr Kathryn Woods and Professor Nicola Walshe.

In attendance: Professor Katherine Holt (Minute 56 and following item); Ms Sally Mackenzie (Minute 56); Mr Alex Craven; Ms Lizzie Vinton; Mr Ashley Doolan (Secretary); Mr Rob Traynor (Assistant Secretary) and Ms Megan Gerrie (Observer).

Apologies: Dr Nicole Brown; Mr Ian Davis; Dr Cathy Elliott; Ms Manya Gupta; Dr Margaret Mayston; Ms Issy Smith and Professor Stan Zochowski.

Part I: Preliminary Business

51. Welcome, Apologies and Announcements

51.1. The Chair led colleagues in extending thanks on behalf of Education Committee (EdCom) to Professor Arne Hofmann, Director of Education and Faculty Tutor in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and the Faculty of Social and Historical Sciences for his twelve years of dedicated service to advancing education and the student experience as part of EdCom and the wider UCL community.

51.2. The Chair welcomed the following new members of EdCom, as well as those colleagues attending to present specific agenda items:

- Professor Liz Jones, Vice Dean Education, Faculty of Engineering Sciences
- Prof Jakob Stougaard Nielsen, Vice Dean Education, Faculty of Arts and Humanities

- Dr Cathy Elliott, Vice Dean Education, Faculty of Social and Historical Sciences

52. Minutes

52.1. Approved – the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 December 2023 [EdCom Minutes 38-50, 2023-24] at EDCOM 5-01 (23-24).

53. Matters Arising

53.1. Arising from minute twenty-eight, it was noted that the following departments had been notified that they would be receiving an IQR visit in 2023-24:

- a) Department of Civil, Environmental and Geomatic Engineering
- b) Department of Computer Science
- c) Department of Economics
- d) Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering
- e) Department of Mechanical Engineering
- f) Department of Philosophy
- g) Department of Physics and Astronomy

53.2. Arising from minute forty-one, it was noted that a date had been set for the EdCom Away Day. It would be held on 16 May 2024 at the UCL East campus. The future of the teaching estate would be one prominent area for discussion.

53.3. Arising from minute forty-two, it was noted that the first draft of undergraduate portfolio review returns would be due at the end of the month. Quality and Standards Committee had approved a quality review process to provide feedback on these drafts.

53.4. Arising from minute forty-three, it was noted that following the decision to reconvene the Degree Outcomes Steering Group, it was due to hold its next meeting on 7 February 2024.

53.5. Arising from minute forty-five, it was noted that a student complaint had been submitted related to the lack of teaching provision in Term 3, given UCL's advertisement of programmes being delivered over three terms. Similar feedback had also been received at a recent townhall with current students. EdCom was reminded of the challenge presented in this area, the uneven picture across the university at present, and the importance of the PEP project and the Extended Learning Opportunities work to address it.

54. Report of Chair's Action

- 54.1. The Chair reported that she had approved the outcomes of the IOE Early Years Primary and Literacy Clusters (IOE) and Science and Technology Studies MSc (MAPS) Boards of Examiners in line with the emergency procedures for handling external examiner absence. Both board teams were commended for the actions they had taken to ensure that standards were upheld in difficult circumstances.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

55. Student Experience Outcomes: Progress Update

- 55.1. Received – an invitation from the Chair for members to share updates on work being undertaken to improve the student experience within their departments and faculties, and challenges that are arising in doing so. During the conversation, the following points were noted:
- a) That there continued to be challenges related to the quality of AV available in external teaching spaces – particularly related to the challenges of recording sessions in non-lecture capture enabled environments. It was agreed that Dr Fiona Strawbridge would follow this up with specific EdCom members to get more feedback on the issues and identify mitigating actions.
 - b) That the recent publication of the Coroner's report into the death of Matthew Wickes, a student at the University of Southampton, had raised specific concerns about the lack of robust personal tutoring practice – particularly in the light of increased anxiety surrounding the academic experience post-pandemic. EdCom noted that UCL would need to take this into account through its own personal tutoring review – to ensure it was enabling tutors to keep sufficient records of advice and tutoring sessions.
 - c) That student representatives in the faculties of Arts and Humanities and Social and Historical Sciences had requested enhancements to the current system for electing and supporting student representatives. They raised concerns about the timing of the elections, and their poor visibility. They also noted that the role of the representatives was poorly understood among staff and students. EdCom noted that enhancements were already in place to the election process, and that the Democracy and Representation team in the Students' Union would take forward the feedback.

56. Research Intensive Education

- 56.1. Received – a presentation on the progress of the Research Intensive Education working group presented by Professor Katherine Holt, Vice Dean Education for the Faculty of Mathematics and Physical Sciences and Ms Sally Mackenzie, Associate

Director, Office of the Vice Provost Education and Student Experience (OVPESE). EdCom was asked to note the report and comment on the appropriateness of the direction of travel.

- 56.2. EdCom noted that the work, which was part of the implementation of the Excellence in Education statement, sought to understand what was already happening in this area, and working well, and where there were opportunities for development.
- 56.3. That the group felt that it was possible to define a distinctive pathway for how we deliver research intensive education at UCL, while not necessarily a distinctive definition of the principle. This focused on leveraging our strengths: our heritage, our people, and our extensive range of disciplines. Through this, they had reflected on some of the following:
- a) Whether all programmes sufficiently scaffolded learning that enabled a throughline of teaching in research skills, provided space for imaginative or creative thinking, and provided sufficient criticality early enough in the programme. Could more be done to disentangle research skills from being delivered in specific modules, instead making clearer how we are actively embedding them throughout programmes?
 - b) How we could do more to leverage student research, and create learning opportunities through, for example, increasing the access to publication.
 - c) That while we made effective use of staff subject expertise, and the content of their research, in our teaching – we should make more use of their skills as researchers and provide more opportunities for students to access the research environment.
 - d) That more could be done to understand and communicate what it feels like to be part of a research intensive community. Within that, it would be important to remain conscious of the fact that many students are not seeking careers in research *per se*, but broad research skills and understanding are relevant to success in all careers and in personal life.
- 56.4. EdCom warmly welcomed the report and endorsed the direction of travel in terms of the questions and principles that were being originated through its discussions. Colleagues noted particularly the importance of the work looking at fostering creativity, risk taking and interdisciplinarity as key aspects of contemporary research culture.
- 56.5. It was noted that more could be done to support students to reflect on their own research practice, and to expose them to the research journeys of their own teachers – including their successes and failures. Given UCL's high achieving student body – it was important to provide safe spaces for risk taking and failure, given student

aversion and anxiety towards underachieving. This was noted as a key skill by employers – who valued employees who were willing to be creative.

57. Feedback and Assessment

- 57.1. Received – guidance produced by the Senior Education Team of the OVPESE, clarifying aspects of the assessment regulations, and providing guidance on assuring assessment integrity at EDCOM 5-03 (23-24) presented by the Chair and Professor Parama Chaudhury, Pro-Vice Provost Student Academic Experience, OVPESE.
- 57.2. The Chair opened the discussion by stating the key challenges that were facing EdCom, namely that:
- a) Student feedback on their assessment experience had remained poor for at least a decade and had been flagged by Council as something that needed to be urgently rethought.
 - b) That interventions had historically focused on assessment design or load, while the students had clearly been telling us that their problem was with the timing and quality of the feedback they received.
 - c) That the challenges presented by generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools were fundamental, and risked a significant loss of external confidence in the value of a degree award without evidence that we were taking action to ensure the integrity of our assessments.
 - d) That University Management Committee had requested a clear steer for staff preparing their assessments for 2024-25.
- 57.3. The Chair noted that the guidance presented was an interim position, driven by the need to support colleagues who were in the middle of reviewing their assessments for 2024-25. It was acknowledged that further development would be needed.
- 57.4. The guidance focused on providing assurance at a programme level that more than 50% of the assessments were designed to ensure that the student was witnessed completing the work. This would be easier to implement on programmes with more compulsory modules – but it was acknowledged that programmes with increased optionality would need to be assured that each module had at least 50% of its components assessed, in some way, face to face.
- 57.5. Professor Chaudhury reflected on and responded to feedback that had been received on the guidance document to date. She noted:

- a) That programme teams needed to conduct the work in the time that worked best for them – many would be able to complete the work in time for 2024-25, while others may need to take longer.
- b) That the Higher Education Development and Support Institute (HEDS) Faculty Partnership Teams had been asked to work with faculty and department colleagues to develop different options for discipline appropriate assessment models that could be used to provide assurance of integrity.
- c) That work was being undertaken to improve the capability of systems to support colleagues in the maintenance and modification of their module assessments.

57.6. EdCom noted the guidance and the presentation. It was agreed that the challenges that the guidance was produced to address were significant, and that action needed to be taken to improve the integrity of the assessment process. The item was opened for general comment and discussion, within which the following themes were prominent:

- a) Several members noted the need for greater flexibility for programme teams in the approaches they may take to assure the integrity of their assessments. While this flexibility may be intended, the current guidance lacked sufficient nuance to make this clear.
- b) Linked to the above, it was clear that colleagues did not welcome a move back to face-to-face examinations, which were perceived as a poor method for testing application of knowledge and were unpopular with students. They impressed the urgency of providing clear guidance on other ways that the principles could be applied in a way that still enabled authentic assessment.
- c) That there was a need to address distance learning programmes, of which UCL has a growing number, where the expectation is that students will never attend in person. How can integrity be assured when online proctoring is not supported by UCL, both for financial and ethical reasons.
- d) Several members of EdCom noted that the guidance paper lacked clarity as it was trying to address multiple issues at once, namely the challenge of assuring integrity of assessment, the poor feedback experience reported by students, and a strategic approach to assessment for the next three years. It needed to be redrafted to ensure the messages were conveyed more clearly.
- e) Student feedback, via the Students' Union Education Zone, noted that the principles were clear, and that the work should have been done to implement them a long time ago. They particularly welcomed the improved clarity of expectation in terms of feedback turnaround times, and the requirement to receive feedback before the next

assessment. Students also noted that there was already unfairness in the assessment experience – students following programmes with more in person assessments were not benefitting from GenAI tools to the same extent as those on coursework heavy programmes.

57.7. The Chair reflected on the discussion and summarised her responses to some of the feedback:

- a) She confirmed that the intention of the document was not to encourage colleagues to move back to invigilated exams, and that there were many other methods of assessment that could be conducted in-person, including discussion of draft assignments, lab and practical work, presentations etc.
- b) She noted that we should be training our students on how to use GenAI tools as they will form a part of every modern workplace, and all graduates will be expected to know how to use them. For example, it is to be expected that all students will use them to assist their learning. However, we must ensure that they are trained to use them ethically, and that it is clear when the use of them is either undesirable in supporting students' learning, or not permitted.
- c) She acknowledged that the challenge was significant, and that it would require significant work to address, but that the alternative was to not take action to address concerns about the integrity of our assessments, and the subsequent value of our awards. This would be a significant disservice to our students and a failure of EdCom to uphold our responsibility to maintain the quality and standards of our provision.

57.8. The Chair confirmed that the guidance would be reviewed iteratively, based on the feedback received.

Secretary's Note: It has subsequently been confirmed that, following discussion of the revised guidance with faculty education teams, it will be presented to the next meeting of EdCom.

58. Recruitment and Admissions Governance

58.1. Noted – that due to time constraints, discussion of and feedback on paper EDCOM 5-04 (23-24) would be conducted outside of the meeting and that colleagues were encouraged to directly email Ms Sarah Cowsls and Ms Marie Gallagher.

59. Academic Flexibility for Elite Athletes Policy

59.1. Received – a proposal to introduce a policy for the support of elite athletes at EDCOM 5-05 (23-24) which had been endorsed by the Education Policy Scrutiny Panel (EPSP) and Faculty Tutor Forum. This paper was not presented due to time

constraints; however, a vote was conducted on approving the proposal – which was passed by a significant majority of members.

Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

60. Minutes of subcommittees and working groups

60.1. Approved – the minutes of the 25 May 2023 meeting of the Student Life Committee at EDCOM 5-06 (23-24).

60.2. Approved – the minutes of the 30 May 2023 meeting of the Student Staff Partnership Committee at EDCOM 5-07 (23-24)

61. Any other business

61.1. No other business was noted.

62. Date of the next meeting

62.1. EdCom's remaining meetings for the 2023-24 academic year are scheduled for:

- Thursday, 25 April 2024, 14:00 - 16:30
- Thursday, 27 June 2024, 14.00 - 16:30
- Thursday 25 July 2024, 14:00 - 16:30

Ashley Doolan
February 2024