



Education Committee

Thursday 25 July 2024

Minutes (Confirmed)

Present:

Professor Kathleen Armour (Chair)

Ms Karen Barnard; Mr Shaban Chaudhury; Ms Sarah Cows; Mr Ian Davis; Professor Sally Day; Dr Julie Evans; Mr Daniel Farrell; Mr Ben Fowler; Mr Matteo Fumagalli; Ms Katherine Fletcher; Professor Ann Griffin; Professor Liz Jones; Dr Rachel King; Ms Darcy Lan; Mr Zak Liddell; Ms Blathnaid Mahony; Professor Margaret Mayston; Mr Trevor Pearce; Professor Paola Pedarzani; Professor Mary Richardson; Professor Aeli Roberts; Mr Mike Rowson; Dr Hazel Smith; Professor Olga Thomas; Dr Kathryn Woods, Ms Eda Yildirimkaya and Professor Stan Zochowski.

In attendance: Dr Nick Grindle (item 9); Mr Steve Rowett; Mr Ashley Doolan (Secretary) and Mr Rob Traynor (Assistant Secretary).

Apologies: Dr Nicole Brown; Professor Parama Chaudhury; Ms Manya Gupta; Ms June Hedges; Dr Sandra Leaton-Gray; Dr Jennifer McGowan; Professor Norbert Pachler; Dr Francesca Scott; Ms Jo Stroud; and Dr Nalini Vittal.

Part I: Preliminary Business

96. Welcome, Apologies and Announcements

- 96.1. The Chair led colleagues in congratulating the Students' Union Education Officer on his re-election and welcomed the new Equity and Inclusion Officer and Postgraduate Officer to their first meeting.
- 96.2. The Chair also congratulated Professor Sally Day, Professor Paola Pedarzani and Professor Stan Zochowski on their re-election to Education Committee following Academic Board elections. It was also noted that Professor Ulrich Tiedau would join the committee from September 2024 following his election.
- 96.3. The Chair thanked Dr Nicole Brown and Dr Rachel King for their contributions to Education Committee following the conclusion of their terms of office as Academic Board representatives.

96.4. Finally, the Chair led colleagues in thanking Dr Julie Evans, Faculty Tutor of the Faculty of Brain Sciences, for her service to education and the student experience during her tenure and wished her well for her semi-retirement.

97. Minutes of the last meeting

97.1. Approved – the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 June 2024 [EdCom Minutes 80-95, 2023-24] at EDCOM 8-01 (23-24).

98. Matters Arising

98.1. Noted – that Council had approved a change to Statutes to change the name of Student Staff Consultative Committees to Student Partnership Committees, effective September 2024. The Chair thanked Professor Kathryn Woods, Mr Shaban Chaudhury and Mr Rob Traynor for their work on achieving this change.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

99. National Student Survey 2024

99.1. Received - the paper at EDCOM 8-02 (23-24), introduced by the Chair. She started by congratulating those departments that had seen improvements in their NSS scores this year, particularly Chemistry and the Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering (EEE).

99.2. The Chair noted that, that student satisfaction with the quality of teaching had performed poorly against the rest of the Russell Group for the second year in a row, and that this was a significant risk for national league table position and the upcoming Teaching Excellence Framework submission in 2025-26. The free text comments seemed to suggest that students perceived a lack of interest or engagement from their teachers in the material they were delivering, and that there was more remote learning happening than was necessarily appropriate.

99.3. The Chair also noted that there were challenges emerging in Organisation and Management, mostly due to scheduling/timetabling challenges but also down to poor communication about changes to programme delivery. The marginal improvement in the Assessment and Feedback category was welcomed and noted as the first positive change in many years, but UCL remains poorly positioned within the Russell Group, so sustained action is needed.

99.4. The Chair asked members to reflect on proposed actions for the coming year, namely:

- a) That Department Education Plans focus specifically on areas of challenge related to teaching, assessment, and organisation and management.
- b) That more work is done to learn from the pockets of excellent practice, and practice that has turned previously poor performance around, to assist those areas persistently struggling.
- c) To review the staff development offer from the Higher Education Development and Support Institute to ensure that it is speaking directly to the needs expressed in our data.

99.5. During discussion, members made the following contributions:

- a) That while the staff development offer at UCL was not vastly different to that being offered elsewhere, engagement was significantly lower than at other institutions. There was a need to identify and overcome the barriers to participation.
- b) That change needs to be led from the top in each department. For example, the support of the Head of Department was crucial in leading improvements in EEE – particularly where competing demands needed arbitration in favour of supporting teaching.
- c) That while there was no significant correlation between the size of cohort and the level of satisfaction, some large cohorts are highly satisfied while others are not, there is clear evidence that in some big programmes, students are feeling undervalued or unseen.
- d) That there was a lack of “programme” sense in many departments, and that this impacted on how programmes were organised, delivered, and communicated to students. The Programme Excellence Project would be focused on re-establishing the status of the programme during 2024-25.

99.6. Resolved – that this discussion would be incorporated into the institutional NSS action planning for 2024-25.

100. Delayed Assessment Scheme

100.1. Received – a proposal to implement a new Delayed Assessment policy, replacing the self-certified extenuating circumstances route for 2024-25 at EDCOM 8-03 (23-24), presented by Zak Liddell, Director of Education Services. It was noted that consultation with Faculty Deans had already received positive responses from nine of eleven faculties, with two remaining to feed back.

100.2. In presenting the paper, the following points were noted:

- a) That the scheme was designed to recognise the pressures our students are facing and to enable them to take responsibility for managing their own workload, while introducing more restricted mitigations than the self-certification process.
- b) That work was being conducted at pace to ensure that both the notification system and the communications to departments and students would be ready for the start of the academic year.
- c) That Education Committee is being asked to approve an institutional policy, and that individual faculties would be permitted to opt out in the first year but would need to retain self-certification.
- d) That students would still be able to use the evidenced extenuating circumstances process to receive more significant mitigation should they need it.

100.3. Education Committee commended the Director of Education Services for the way that the development and consultation of the policy was conducted. It had been clearly communicated at each stage how feedback was incorporated, and this was greatly appreciated.

100.4. Resolved – to approve the Delayed Assessment Scheme as institutional policy, with a commitment to a review of its operation after the first year. The Faculty of Laws representative agreed that they would follow up after the meeting to confirm whether their Faculty would participate.

101. Programme Excellence Project Update and Master Plan

101.1. Received – a paper updating on changes to the governance structure within the Programme Excellence Project (PEP) and an overview of the master plan for phase two of the project, the Curriculum Review, at EDCOM 8-04 (23-24), presented by Professor Kathryn Woods, Pro-Vice Provost Student Engagement. She noted the following:

- a) The adjustments to the governance and the way the project is structured have been made in recognition of the different needs of Phase Two. It also seeks to achieve some efficiencies between different, closely associated groups, and to align discussions about the Curriculum Information Management System (CIMS) and PEP, as one will enable and rely on the outcomes of the other.
- b) That work has already been started to prepare for the curriculum review. For example, a piece of desk-based research on how our competitors' structure and manage their curriculum has been commissioned. In addition, draft principles of curriculum excellence, and resources supporting the operationalisation of these, are being prepared for community discussion in Term One of 2024-25.

- c) Curriculum review will likely consist of two outputs per programme, a self-assessment, and a new programme blueprint, which is intended to be a programme specification that includes additional detail about how to operationalise the programme. It was noted that a Programme Specification is a standard QA requirement for all degree programmes in the sector, so the PEP process would address that gap too.

101.2. EdCom noted that more information would follow at the first meeting in 2024-25, with commencement of the review process from the start of Term Two.

102. Degree Outcomes Steering Group

102.1. Received – a paper summarising the outcome of modelling work conducted on behalf of the Degree Outcomes Steering Group, considering the impact of different adjustments to our undergraduate degree classification algorithms at EDCOM 8-05 (23-24), presented by Zak Liddell, Director of Education Services, and prepared by Lisa French, Quality and Standards Manager.

102.2. Members noted the following during their discussion of the modelling:

- a) That compared to the benchmark group, UCL is the only institution to drop credits from the second year, and one of very few to include credits from the first year.
- b) That our current algorithm, particularly Classification Scheme A, enables the award of more first class outcomes than would be the case if we were more closely aligned to peer institutions.
- c) Any decision about changes to classification schemes, while informed by this modelling, would need to be based on a wider, pedagogy led, conversation with the wider university community.

102.3. Members agreed that these findings were important and needed to be factored into further discussion about how we classify our undergraduate degrees. Based on conversations about the status of Year One at the last Education Committee, there was clearly interest in exploring this further, although it was noted that this conversation could only be conducted when colleagues had capacity to engage.

102.4. EdCom endorsed the work of the Degree Outcomes Steering Group, its alignment with the timelines for the revised curriculum, and encouraged Quality and Standards Committee to explore further modelling of the impact of changes on different demographic groups.

103. Review of Examination Boards

103.1. Received – a report from the Exam Board Review Working Group of the Quality and Standards Committee at EDCOM 8-06 (23-24), presented by Ashley Doolan, Head of

Academic Policy, Quality and Standards. The report asked EdCom to consider eight recommendations, four to implement in 2024-25, and four to consult on in 2024-25 to implement in 2025-26.

103.2. EdCom noted that it was asked to consider approval of the following recommendations for 2024-25:

- a) Publish guidance for Boards of Examiners highlighting the requirement to agree, publish, review, and make available clear departmental policies on internal assessment scrutiny, marker training, second marking, and internal moderation.
- b) Review the statistical reports provided to Boards of Examiners to enable them to conduct comparisons across a programme and between academic years (at module and programme level) to enable them to monitor standards between modules, programmes and across academic years.
- c) Review the role of the External Examiner to clarify that they are being asked to provide their scrutiny, comment, and assurance at the programme, not the module, level.
- d) Review the restriction on appointing an individual who has been involved in collaborative working with a member of the department in the last five years.

103.3. EdCom endorsed implementation of these proposals for 2024-25. It noted that QSC would commission the development of guidance and templates to enable the implementation of the first and third recommendations. EdCom also endorsed the proposal to consult on the recommendations related to the review of the terms of reference of Boards of Examiners.

103.4. During discussions of external review, members raised a query around the role of external scrutineers in the programme suspension and/or withdrawal process. Currently, UCL requires an external scrutineer, normally the external examiner, to provide commentary on any proposal to suspend a programme. It also requires notification to the external examiner on any decision to withdraw a programme. Members sought clarity on the purpose of this, and whether it was appropriate for this level of external involvement in an operational decision.

103.5. It was clarified that the most appropriate role of an external scrutineer in this process was to comment on any proposed teach out and student protection activity the department would implement in the event of a programme withdrawal. EdCom agreed that regulations and procedures should be reviewed to reflect this clarification.

104. Peer Dialogue Scheme

104.1. Received and approved a proposal to simplify the regulatory requirement for all staff involved in a significant amount of teaching to undertake peer dialogue at least once per year at EDCOM 8-07 (23-24), presented by Dr Nick Grindle, Higher Education Development and Support Institute.

104.2. Resolved – to include a clear statement in the Academic Manual that all staff with significant teaching responsibilities are required to undertake peer dialogue at least once per year, with guidance on appropriate forms of dialogue provided separately.

105. Graduate Outcomes Survey

105.1. Received – a paper outlining the latest responses to the Graduate Outcomes Survey at EDCOM 8-08 (23-24), presented by Karen Barnard, Director of the Higher Education Development and Support Institute. The following points were noted in the report:

- a) Overseas graduate response rates were affected by HESA's decision not to make follow up calls – which are done for UK students. The Russell Group is making representations to emphasise the importance of raising these response rates.
- b) That while the overall unemployment rate for undergraduate students is not benchmarking well, the compound benchmark is being held up by our high performance in the number of graduates in highly skilled work.
- c) That our overall performance is being affected by the London unemployment factor – 8.1% of undergraduates graduating in London are unemployed by latest figures.

105.2. Edcom noted the success of a pilot exit survey of graduates conducted in 2023-24. This exit survey established where graduates were struggling to line up a job following graduation, and targeted additional coaching sessions. 141 sessions were delivered, and the outcomes will be tracked.

106. Student Life Committee

106.1. Received and approved a proposal to retire the Student Life Committee and incorporate its terms of reference and schedule of business into an expanded and reconstituted Student Partnership Committee from 2024-25 at EDCOM 8-09 (23-24) presented by Professor Kathryn Woods, Pro-Vice Provost Student Engagement.

Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

107. Approval of New Taught Programmes of Study at UCL

107.1. Approved – the new programmes of study recommended to Education Committee by the Programme and Module Approval Panel at EDCOM 8-10 (23-24).

108. Approval of Academic Manual Chapters 2024-25

108.1. Approved – the revisions and updates to Chapter 2: Student Support Framework for 2024-25 at EDCOM 8-11(23-24).

108.2. Approved – the revisions and updates to Chapter 3: Registration Framework for Taught Students for 2024-25 at EDCOM 8-12 (23-24).

108.3. Approved – the revisions and updates to Chapter 4: Assessment Framework for Taught Students k for 2024-25 at EDCOM 8-13 (23-24).

108.4. Approved – the revisions and updates to Chapter 6: Student Casework Framework for 2024-25 at EDCOM 8-14 (23-24).

108.5. Approved – the revisions and updates to Chapter 9: Quality Review Framework for 2024-25 at EDCOM 8-15 (23-24)

109. Any Other Business

109.1. Resolved – to explore the possibility of adding a role description for Personal Tutors to Chapter 12 of the Academic Manual.

110. Dates of Next Meeting

110.1. Noted – that 2024-25 meeting dates would be circulated prior to the start of session.

Ashley Doolan
September 2024