Operations Committee

20 March 2024 at 1:00pm

Online via Microsoft Teams

Minutes

Present Members:
Aimie Chapple, Vice-President (Operations) (Chair); Suzy Adcock; Marion Atkinson; Jeremy Barraud; Beth Beasant; Mike Brown; Simon Buller; Georgina Cade; Sara Collins; Donna Dalrymple; Ian Dancy; Geoff Dunk; Helen Fisher; Clare Foyle; Ian Galloway; Megan Gerrie; Dr Thea Gibbs; Claire Glen; Alex Hall; Lesley Houfe; Tansy Jones; Natasha Lewis; Sian Lunt; Mary McHarg; Andy Smith; Julie Smith; Thomas Turner; Julie Whetton; Rebecca Whitham; Donna Williamson.

Apologies:
Dr Paul Ayris; Jason Clarke; Sarah Cowls; Charu Gorasia; Katy Hamilton; Ciaran Moynihan; David Pacey; Dr Kathryn Walsh.

In Attendance:
Adrien Cooper, Director of Campus Infrastructure & Operations (for Minute 35); Daniel Farrell, Director of Student Operations (for Minute 36); Marie Gallagher, Director of Operations (for Sarah Cowls); Neil Green, Head of International Student Recruitment (for Minute 32); Arun Kumar, P&S Hub Consultant (for Minute 33); Joe Lay, Director of Accommodation (for Minute 32); Bella Malins, Director of Access and Admissions; Stephanie McColl, Teaching Manager, Faculty of Medical Sciences; Rupal Patel (Director of Operations Planning); Margaret Spink, Business Transformation Advisor (Operations) (for Minute 33); Leon Tang, Sub-Category Manager, Commercial & Procurement (for Minute 34).

Officer:
Olivia Whiteley

Part I: Preliminary Business

30. Minutes of the last meeting (4-01)

30.1. Operations Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2024.

31. Matters arising from the minutes

31.1. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

32. Admissions, recruitment and accommodation

32.1. Operations Committee was briefed on changes in the process of allocating accommodation following lessons learned from a shortfall in allocations in 2023-24, noting that this had arisen from a convergence of timing and communications issues rather than from a lack of demand. To better monitor take-up and manage the risks associated with fluctuation, changes included a recategorisation of applicants into priority groups, with allocations being made earlier than in previous years to those in the top priority group, as well as the application portal remaining open for a longer period. For the first time allocations were being made to conditional Undergraduate (UG) applicants in an effort to provide early reassurance on accommodation. Data on acceptance and conversion, as well as from UCAS and the Accept and Decline Surveys, would be used to measure the impact of the changes including comparatively within the sector.

32.2. During discussion the following key points were addressed:

a. It was a priority to communicate via the relevant channels the guarantee of accommodation where applicable, since this was a strong message and would provide significant reassurance to students.
b. There was a good level of confidence that the top priority group would be accommodated, and that the earlier allocations including to conditional UG offer holders would provide students with early reassurance.
c. Committee members emphasised the need for the close working of teams in Accommodation, Student Recruitment, Communications and Marketing and Finance, and to closely monitor numbers, so that risks in different directions could be identified and mitigated. It was noted that the Director of Accommodation would be a member of the Recruitment and Admissions Committee, which was soon to be established as a sub-committee of UMC and would meet regularly to discuss student numbers.
d. It was suggested that the Leadership briefing would be an agile tool for communicating updates on acceptances and allocations. Students might also benefit from greater visibility in the process of allocation, including having sight of the volume of places available or allocated, when considering acceptance of offers. Enhanced communication and surveying of applicants to set out the availability of accommodation across Bloomsbury and Stratford and to establish the likelihood of acceptance of a place at either campus was also suggested.

e. The Chair reminded the Committee of the overarching Estates Masterplan and the need to consider student accommodation as part of an overarching strategy.
f. It was recognised that departments would be at differing places in terms of numbers of offer holders and meeting targets. The importance of the guarantee of accommodation, for a new student in particular, and of conversion activities, was emphasised.

33. PS Hub and Strategic Change – KPIs

33.1. Operations Committee received an update on progress in the development of a series of operational Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the PS Hub, noting that this was in iterative development with reporting beginning in January 2024. Around 30 metrics had been developed, with a focus on savings targets in recruitment, estates and revenue, as well as on overpayments. Sequencing, along with leveraging AI and other tools and databases, had been found to be important in striking a balance between the systematic measuring of service satisfaction among stakeholders and the risk of survey fatigue.

33.2. In the course of the discussion, the following key points were made:
a. It was intended that Operations Committee would regularly review a dashboard of KPIs across the Professional Services capabilities and functions, with Committee members able to share key messages with their constituencies. To help inform the development of the dashboard, members were encouraged to consider the metrics that would be useful to their constituencies.
b. A KPIs dashboard would be a welcome development, providing a basis for Operations Committee to focus on improvement as well as monitoring.
c. Operations Committee was reminded of recent and forthcoming changes in the PS Hub, including the Continuous Improvement function which had moved into the PS Hub in January, and the incoming PS Hub Director and Strategic Change Director who would take up posts in April and June respectively. Strengthening project management capabilities for the priority 1 projects, especially in EASE, ESM and functions, had been a key area of focus. ESM was currently in the middle of a design workshop phase with third parties.
d. The scope for Operations Committee to play a leading role in addressing data quality risks in systems and processes was welcomed.
e. Operations Committee acknowledged the challenges associated with monitoring strategic implementation alongside business-as-usual (BAU) activities, which could represent competing demands.

34. Confidential: ClarityGO – Go Live and Measurement (4-02)

34.1. Exempt from publication, please see confidential minutes.

34.2. Exempt from publication, please see confidential minutes.

35. Strategic Maintenance Plans / My Campus

35.1. Operations Committee was briefed on developments focused on cost-efficiency and consistency in the strategic maintenance of the Estate. Key achievements included the creation of a new agile maintenance hub in Foster Court, improved engagement with the UCL community, and the completion of Phases 1 and 2 of an Asset and Condition Survey which had delivered high-value information though at some cost. A further key development was the recent launch of My Campus, a new portal for raising and managing support requests. My Campus offered new opportunities in delivering a customer-centric approach to Estates maintenance, improving user access and reporting, and supporting transparent reporting against KPIs. Plans for the future of My Campus included harmonisation across all campuses, Phase 3 of the Asset and Condition Survey, and project management on which feasibility scoping was underway.

35.2. During discussion, the following points were addressed:

a. Usability of the My Campus system was driving demand. As data capture matured, this should inform performance measures and improvements in the My Campus infrastructure and service.
b. It would be important to prioritise My Campus given its key role in supporting statutory compliance, safety and asset management.
c. Committee members were asked to encourage their constituencies to move to using My Campus. There would be communications to support staff in knowing when to use My Campus and when to use other systems, such as riskNET, for reporting. Faculty Directors of Operations in particular were asked to contact the Executive Director, Estates Operations, should they wish to suggest that Estates work with anyone from the Faculties beyond the Departmental Safety Officers on developing riskNET.
d. It was acknowledged that a streamlined approach, involving fewer systems, was preferable for users, and that this was under consideration as part of the Digital Strategy.

36. Timetabling (4-03)

36.1. Operations Committee received the paper which provided an update on activities undertaken by the Central Timetabling Team to improve the timetable for 2023-24 and which outlined plans for further improvements in preparation for the 2024-25 timetable.

36.2. In the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

a. Since the paper had been circulated, further conversation had taken place with Birkbeck providing reassurance that strategically important spaces would be available for UCL timetabling. The sourcing of additional large teaching spaces remained an issue, however, with external institutions generally preferring customers with other commercial requirements such as catering.
b. While contentions might arise from the suite of recommendations to improve the non-process element of timetabling, these were actively being considered in meeting the timetabling challenge.
c. The current methodology took as its basis a reshaped approach to delivering scheduling, for reasons associated with the supporting data, resource and culture. Going forward, departmental timetablers would play a key role in delivery.
d. Early integration with recruitment and admissions, monitoring of numbers, and cross-team communication would be key in identifying and addressing risks in timetabling as plans progressed.

Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

37. Future shape of Operations Committee

37.1. The Chair thanked Operations Committee members for a productive operational discussion, noting that a continued focus on BAU activities while negotiating strategic change would be a key task for the Committee going forward.

38. Date of the next meeting

38.1. The next meeting would take place on 16 May 2024 at 10:00am.

Olivia Whiteley, Secretary to Operations Committee
April 2024