



## ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

Thursday 17 October 2013

### MINUTES

*PRESENT:*

Professor Anthony Smith (*Chair*)

Provost and President  
Mr David Ashton  
Professor David Bogle  
Professor Robert Brown  
Professor Richard Catlow  
Dr Brenda Cross  
Dr Caroline Essex  
Dr Julie Evans  
Professor Mike Ewing  
Mr Marco Federighi  
Professor Mary Fulbrook  
Ms Tracy Herman  
Dr Christine Hoffmann

Dr Arne Hofmann  
Dr Helen Matthews  
Professor Alan Penn  
Professor David Price  
Dr Peter Raven  
Dr Hilary Richards  
Professor Elizabeth Shephard  
Dr Ruth Siddall  
Dr Eva Sorensen  
Ms Olga Thomas  
Mr Ben Towse  
Ms Soo Ware

In attendance: Mr Jason Clarke (Secretary); Mr Dominique Fourniol; Ms Clare Goudy; Ms Judith Hillmore; Ms Valerie Hogg; Professor Charles Mitchell (*vice* Professor Dame Hazel Genn).

Apologies for absence were received from: Dr Paul Ayris; Professor Steve Caddick; Professor Anthony Finkelstein; Mr Keir Gallagher; Professor Dame Hazel Genn; Dr Leonie Hannan; Mr Tim Perry; Ms Mary Rimington;

*Key to abbreviations*

|       |                                       |
|-------|---------------------------------------|
| AC    | Academic Committee                    |
| DTC   | Department Teaching Committee         |
| EdCom | Education Committee                   |
| FTC   | Faculty Teaching Committee            |
| GPA   | Grade Point Average                   |
| NSS   | National Student Survey               |
| OIA   | Office of the Independent Adjudicator |
| PGTA  | Postgraduate Teaching Assistant       |
| QAA   | Quality Assurance Agency              |



room bookings office, there was also a need to look at the way in which departments used the room booking system to book space, especially large teaching spaces. It would also be important to identify any measures which could be put in place quickly to deliver immediate improvements to the operation of the room bookings system.

**3C Academic Committee Working Group on the GPA [AC Min.51, 4.7.13]**

***Noted:***

- 3C.1 The Chair reported that UCL had accepted an invitation from Sir Bob Burgess to participate in the national pilot of the GPA system which was being co-ordinated by the Higher Education Academy.

**3D Academic Committee Working Group on Programme Review [AC Min.52, 4.7.13]**

***Noted:***

- 3D.1 The Chair reported that good progress was being made by the Working Group in reviewing the purpose and operation of programme review within UCL-bqto

ratings on assessment and feedback had flatlined since 2010, against an improvement across the sector. A review of UCL's Assessment Strategy, including a review of assessment practices across the institution, had been initiated. Also, it had been suggested that UCL was over-assessing its students compared to its peer institutions.

- The UCLU representatives supported the suggestion that students should be represented at all levels of the university and requested that student representatives be involved actively in the process of departments drawing-up NSS action plans.
- Strengthening the StARs system was seen by staff and student members of AC as an important way of improving the student representation system. It was suggested by the Provost that it might be more effective for the election of StARS to be co-ordinated by UCLU rather than departments and it was agreed that he and the Vice-Provost (Education)/AC Chair would explore this further with the UCLU officers.
- The UCLU representatives also expressed concern that UCL's service standards in relation to the provision of feedback on assessed work are not being adhered to. They also highlighted a number of issues (eg training and remuneration) relating to the increasing use being made by many departments of PGTA's to undertake teaching and marking.
- On the issue of programme diets, the Vice-Provost (Education)/AC Chair observed that while UCL has between 200-300 different programme titles at both undergraduate and postgraduate-taught levels, it has more than 10,000 active programme diets; of those, around 8,000 programme diets are each followed by a single student. Simplifying the number of programme diets might reduce administrative overheads and might release time for staff to concentrate on key tasks such as assessment and providing effective and timely feedback to students.
- The commitment from the SMT to take a lead on improving not just the NSS results but also the student experience more generally was welcomed by members of AC. A member of AC expressed the view that while members of DTCS and FTCs are aware of these issues, there was a need in some areas for a greater commitment on the part of heads of department to prioritise student- and teaching-related matters. On that theme, it was also suggested that a review and reform of promotion and reward structures was needed in order to give due recognition to the importance of teaching and education.
- It was suggested that the increasing demands being made on academic staff's time in terms of international engagement, entrepreneurial activities, knowledge transfer *etc* had meant that they did not have sufficient time to focus on their core academic responsibilities in relation to research and education (which included assessment of student work and providing feedback to them on their performance and progression).
- In drawing the discussion to a close, the Vice-Provost (Education)/AC Chair made the following observations: (i) it was accepted that there was a need to review the way in which UCL recognises and rewards teaching eg the criteria for the Provost's Teaching Awards had traditionally focussed on *innovations* in teaching, whereas in future there would be a much greater emphasis on *excellence* in teaching; (ii) there was a need to review the timing and range of module choices; the SMT had already committed to introducing earlier module selection in 2014-15 for the 2015-16 session and EdCom would be overseeing that initiative; and (iii) there was a need to review how UCL surveys students early on in their careers and how student satisfaction is captured across the full range of student services. AC would return to this issue at its March 2014 meeting once responses from departments, including action plans, had been received.

