

Council

Friday 17 April 2020 at 9:15am

Minutes

Present Members:

Professor Michael Arthur; Mr Mintoo Bhandari; Mr Dominic Blakemore; Mr Victor Chu CBE, Chair; Professor Lucie Clapp; Dr Alun Coker; Professor Annette Dolphin; Dr Andrew Gould; Professor Patrick Haggard; Ms Lindsay Nicholson MBE; Mr Turlogh O'Brien CBE; Ms Caroline Paige; Professor Hynek Pikhart; Professor Helen Roberts; Lord Sharkey; Ms Ashley Slanina-Davies; Mr Philip Sturrock MBE; Mr Justin Turner QC; Baroness Valentine; Ms Sarah Whitney.

Attendees:

For Minutes 72 - 87: Dame Nicola Brewer, Vice-Provost (International)
For Minutes 72 - 87: Dr Celia Caulcott, Vice-Provost (Enterprise)
For Minutes 72 - 87: Dr Clare Goudy, Provost's Chief of Staff
For Minutes 72 - 87: Mr Phil Harding, Director of Finance & Business Affairs
For Minutes 72 - 87: Ms Natasha Lewis, Director of Legal Services
For Minutes 72 - 85: Professor David Lomas, Vice-Provost (Health)
For Minutes 72 - 87: Professor David Price, Vice-Provost (Research)
For Minutes 72 - 87: Ms Fiona Ryland, Chief Operating Officer
For Minutes 72 - 85: Professor Anthony Smith, Vice-Provost Education & Student Affairs
For Minute 76: Mr Kevin Argent, Deputy Director Estates and Director of Estates and Development

Officers:

Ms Wendy Appleby, Secretary to Council
Ms Anne Marie O'Mullane, Assistant Secretary to Council
Ms Olivia Whiteley, Governance Officer

Part I: Preliminary Business

72. Operation of the Council Meeting

72.1. The Chair set out the protocols for conducting the meeting virtually via Microsoft Teams. As remote participation in meetings where members could not see and hear each other simultaneously was not defined by UCL's

Statutes¹, items marked for approval would be signed off by Chair's action following the meeting, where there was overall agreement amongst those participating that the item could be approved.

73. Declaration of Interests

- 73.1. Dame Nicola Brewer stood down as a Non-Executive Director of Scottish Power Ltd on 16 March 2020. On 2 April 2020, Dame Nicola was appointed a Non-Executive Director ("Consejero") of Iberdrola S. A., the parent company of Scottish Power. Dame Nicola was also appointed as a member of the Board's committee on Sustainable Development.

74. Minutes (4-60)

- 74.1. Council approved the minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2020 subject to the following amendments:

Part II: Strategic Items for Discussion

76. Provost's Business

- 76.1. The Provost reported on the steps being taken to address the impact of COVID-19, noting that a number of these items had also been covered in the telephone briefing on 2 April 2020:

Governance Structures

- a. A Gold/Silver/Bronze governance structure had been put in place to replace SMT during the COVID-19 crisis. This allowed UCL to respond quickly to the challenges being faced. Project Aquamarine had been established to deal with acute issues resulting from COVID-19 and Project Sapphire had been established to deal with issues related to the next academic year and future work. An integration centre had been established to interrogate the feasibility of proposals before they were referred for decision. A red team had been established to provide challenge to assumptions and to avoid the risks of group think. An External Affairs function had also been established, led by Professor Hazel Genn. The Provost expressed the view that those universities that demonstrate humanity and care for their staff and students, prioritising safety, will be the ones that survive in the longer term.

Examinations

- b. The Vice-Provost (Education and Student Affairs) provided an update on the management of examinations. In total, 3,333 assessments across 2,367 modules were adjusted, equating to 130,000 individual student assessments which was 31% of the total. Of the 2,000 invigilated exams that would have taken place at the Excel Centre, 237 had been excluded because module teams already had enough information about student achievement, 1,061 had been changed to coursework and 667 would be timed exams taken over a 24-hour period. Only 40 exams had been deferred. This had been a huge piece of work; colleagues were thanked for their efforts. The Education Officer, Students' Union UCL and Postgraduate Students' Officer, Students' Union UCL were thanked for their efforts in supporting the development of the no detriment policy designed to ensure that there was no academic disadvantage for this year's cohort. Decisions on examinations had been recommended by Education Committee to Academic Committee who had approved them. Academic Committee had also established a small group to handle emergencies. So far the group had not needed to meet.

Support and help for the PhD community

- c. As laboratory based research had gone into hibernation apart from COVID-19 research, some postgraduate research (PGR) students had been encountering delays to their research and encountering hardship.

UCL was assessing whether more could be done to support researchers who were not covered by the schemes now in place for UKRI and Wellcome-funded researchers.

Mitigating actions

- d. A number of steps had already been taken to mitigate the impact of Coronavirus. These included a recruitment freeze, no international travel permitted until 1 August 2020, lay-off of high-cost consultants and a new system of approval for non-pay spend.

Planning

- e. Longer term scenario planning was taking place and included the input of public health experts and epidemiologists. Scenarios included a surge in Coronavirus with intermittent lockdown that could impact on Term 1 or Term 2. It was difficult to plan with the so many variables and unknown information therefore a range of approaches were being planned and tested.

Insights on recruitment

- f. A British Council survey of 11,000 Chinese students had indicated that, of the 1,800 respondents who already studied outside China, 40% would still study overseas, 20% might continue study overseas, 12% were unlikely to return and 28% remained undecided. The concerns of survey respondents centred on health and safety therefore steps were being taken to provide assurance on this to existing and prospective students.

Communications

- g. Daily updates were being circulated to staff and updates had been provided to Academic Board. The use of technology to run an engagement with Academic Board on 13 May 2020 was being explored.

Sector Developments

- h. UUK had circulated proposals to government which outlined a package of measures which would help to achieve stability in the higher education sector. The proposals included ones designed to mitigate the adverse impact of reduced fee-income from international student recruitment on research activity as international students' fees cross-subsidised research.

External Affairs

- i. An External Affairs Team had been established led by Professor Hazel Genn; Professor Graham Reid would also be a key member. The team would ensure that UCL was able to engage constructively with government in a coordinated fashion, harnessing the breadth of UCL's research expertise.

