



# UCL

## **Academic Board**

**Wednesday 8 February 2023<sup>1</sup>**

## **MINUTES**

**Present:** Dr Michael Spence, President and Provost (Chair).

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Dr Alex Elwick; Dr Andrew Embleton-Thirsk; Dr Emily Emmott; Professor Tariq Enver; Professor Susan Evans; Dr Lorenzo Fabrizi; Professor Mark Farrant; Ava Fatah gen. Schieck; Dr Alexander Fedorec; Professor Delmiro Fernandez-Reyes; Dr Liory Fern-Pollak; Professor Patrizia Ferretti; Professor Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh; Professor Roberto Filippi; Professor Margot Finn; Professor Elizabeth Fisher; Professor Maria Fitzgerald; Dr David Foster; Professor Eric Fraga; Andrea Franchini; Professor Murray Fraser; Dr Richard Freeman; Professor Nicholas Freemantle; Dr Lisa Fridkin; Dr Bettina Friedrich; Dr Martin Fry; Professor Jonathan Gale; Dr

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Yadav; Dr Christine (Xine) Yao; Dr Victoria Yorke-Edwards; Professor Ian Zachary; Dr Anselm Zdebik; Dr Davide Zecchin; Professor Stan Zochowski.

**In attendance:**

Stephen Glover; Charu Gorasia; Dr Clare Goudy; Natasha Lewis; Nick McGhee (secretary); Turlogh O'Brien CBE; Anne Marie O'Mullane; Abigail Smith; Olivia Whiteley.

**Part I: Preliminary Formal Business**

19 **ACADEMIC BOARD MINUTES**

19.1 The minutes of the AB meetings of 2 and 16 November 2022 [AB Minutes 1-16 and 17-18, 2022-23] were confirmed.

**Part II: Matters for Discussion**

20 (Paper 3-01)

20.1 AB noted the report.

Group had noted that there were no UCL-specific definitions of cognate

met with them to outline the nature of the report's recommendations. Two organisations had then summarised their view for UCL's Council. Council's practice was to consider such representations, and it had been deemed appropriate that Academic Board should also have sight of this material.

- f) Academic Board discussed the approaches taken by the IHRA Definition and the Jerusalem Declaration in respect of statements making comparisons between contemporary Israeli policy and Nazism. It had been the view of the Working Group that there was no incompatibility between the IHRA's position that such comparisons 'could be' antisemitic, taking into account the overall context, and the Jerusalem Declaration's position that comparison with historical cases was not 'in and of itself' i

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That UCL condemns antisemitism and takes all reasonable steps to combat it, within a framework that respects the principles of free speech and academic freedom at UCL;

That UCL should recognise the existence of multiple definitions and understandings of antisemitism, including in particular those provided by Helen Fein, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, and the Nexus Task Force;

That the function of such definitions is educative, which means they should be used to promote a better awareness of the existence of antisemitism with a view to addressing and combatting it at UCL;

That these definitions shall not be given determinative weight in the resolution of any proceedings relating to the discipline of university staff or students, in decisions relating to events, or in any other decision affecting the status of staff or students; and that Academic Board requests that Council recognise and adopt the terms of this resolution.

|         |     |        |
|---------|-----|--------|
| Yes     | 228 | 59.36% |
| No      | 65  | 16.93% |
| Abstain | 91  | 23.70% |

- 21.8 The Provost thanked the members of the Working Group for the thoughtful and careful consideration of the issues and the significant amount of work put into the process. Academic Board's advice would be taken to Council, and the Chair of the Working Group invited to present their report.

## 22 **TASK AND FINISH GROUP ON STUDENT NUMBERS REPORT** (Paper 3-03)

- 22.1 The Task and Finish Group on Student Numbers ('the Group') had been set up following the AB meeting of 16 November 2022 as a joint body of Academic Board and UMC. Academic Board received the Group's report, together with an Academic Impact Statement relating to the maximum number of students proposed under Scenario 4 of the Size and Shape paper [AB Minute 64B, 13.09.22].
- 22.2 In the course of a detailed review of the financial modelling underpinning the proposals, the Group had grappled with the imperative of balancing financial sustainability with protection of UCL's academic mission and values. The Group had concluded that the modelling was sound. Alongside the principal sensitivities of student numbers and the unregulated fee, the Group noted that the inflation rate had a significant impact on the model, and that consequently

unregulated fee in order to mitigate the required extent of cost-saving and student number increases, but recognised the impact of this approach on inclusion and diversity. Some level of student number increase however would still be necessary. This should occur where it was academically desirable and primarily away from the Bloomsbury campus.

22.4 In reaching this conclusion the Group had paid particular attention to the academic implications of an increase in student numbers, notably in respect of: the risk of a weakening of the research-led character of the institution, the impact on the quality of programmes, and the impact on UCL's carbon footprint. The report proposed a number of KPIs to monitor the impact of student number increases on academic activity. The Academic Impact Statement noted the intention that the additional staff appointed to teach the additional students be recruited predominantly to research-active, full academic contracts.

22.5 During the course of discussion the following points were raised:

- a) Members flagged the risk of an increase in unregulated fees changing the nature of the student body to that of a financial elite, and having an undue impact on students from the developing world. Any such increase would be accompanied by increased provision of bursaries and scholarships, including for research students.
- b) Members noted the incompatibility of any carbon-based growth with UCL's Net Zero goals. The nature of the carbon impact of online against in-person teaching was open to debate<sup>2</sup>. The issue of carbon impact intersected with that of access and participation in respect of the availability of affordable education to students in the developing world.
- c) In discussing the impact of the volume of teaching on research activity, members queried the flat narrative of a cross-subsidy from one to the other, and noted the significant impact of additional marking and feedback on the time available for research. AB was reminded that the model envisaged increasing staff numbers to reflect an increase in student numbers. An important driver in the process of seeking to establish this model was the facilitation of multi-year budgeting, which would in turn enable the kind of departmental financial planning that would allow for the creation of substantive posts.
- d) The proposal was to deliver growth away from the Bloomsbury campus wherever possible. Members cited examples of the teaching estate being under strain and consequently having a negative impact on the student



not arise in a circular way as a result of the proposed student number increases.

- e) It was noted that student number growth in recent years had been unplanned and had been driven largely by qualification policy changes and the impact of the pandemic. Better preparation was possible in the case of planned growth. AB noted however a residual risk of unplanned growth by overshooting student recruitment targets.
- f) In respect of the impact of increasing student numbers on teaching delivery and programme quality, it was noted that growth would be in disciplines with the ambition to grow and where this was deemed to be feasible and desirable. Members noted the key role of programme leads in determining this question, and the challenge of ensuring that additional teaching income was directed to the right areas given the unpredictable nature of the impact of changes to student numbers and fees. Members also noted the challenge in seeking to amend teaching delivery to fit with student numbers when it was necessary to confirm this significantly in advance. Longer-term planning would help to address this kind of issue, but the immediate challenge was to get to the point of financial sustainability.
- g) Members queried the relationship between financial and academic strategic planning. The chair noted that UCL was already significantly more transparent in this respect than much of the rest of the sector.
- h) Members raised the question of opportunities for increased income generation, including increased industrial partnerships, and subject to the view of the UCL Medical School, the potential scope for government agreement to an increase in the number of medical students, in view of the potential for expanded numbers at the Royal Free campus.

22.6 Academic Board voted on the proposals as follows:

That the report of the Task & Finish Group should be commended to Council as advice to guide the development of the university's Financial Strategy

|         |     |        |
|---------|-----|--------|
| Yes     | 202 | 76.23% |
| No      | 31  | 11.70% |
| Abstain | 32  | 12.08% |

That Professor Patrick Haggard, as co-chair of the Task & Finish Group, should be invited to Council to present the report of the group.

|         |     |        |
|---------|-----|--------|
| Yes     | 232 | 87.55% |
| No      | 15  | 5.66%  |
| Abstain | 18  | 6.79%  |

22.7 The Provost thanked the members of the Task and Finish Group for their work and their rapid delivery of their report.

## 23 **ACADEMIC BOARD STANDING ORDERS** (Paper 3-04)

23.1 A number of proposed changes to the Standing Orders, drafted by GCAB, were submitted to Academic Board for their 'first reading' as required by

Standing Order 1. These would receive their second reading at the meeting of Academic Board on 10 May. GCAB invited comments on the proposed amendments. A further meeting to discussion the matter could be arranged in advance of the second reading if required.

**Part III: Other business for approval or information**

24 **ACADEMIC COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT** (Paper 3-05)

24.1 Noted.

25 **STUDENT SUSPENSIONS AND EXCLUSIONS ANNUAL DATA** (Paper 3-06)

25.1 Noted.

26 **ACADEMIC BOARD TERM 2 MEMBERSHIP UPDATE** (Paper 3-07)

26.1 Noted.

27 **DISCLOSURE OF CONFLICT AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** (Paper 3-08)

27.1 Noted.

28 **MINUTES OF OTHER COMMITTEES** (Paper 3-09)

28.1 Noted.

29 **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

29.1 The next termly meeting would be on 10 May 2023 at 2pm.

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