

ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

20 February 2018

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Professor Anthony Smith (*Vice-Chair*)

Ms Wendy Appleby, Dr Paul Ayris; Dr Simon Banks; Dame Nicola Brewer; Professor Stella Bruzzi; Dr Celia Caulcott; Mr Mark Crawford; Dr Melanie Ehren; Professor Dilly Fung; Dr Arne Hofmann; Dr Sarabajaya Kumar; Dr Ruth Sidd

17 **MINUTES OF 2 NOVEMBER 2017 MEETING**

17.1 **Approved** – the Minutes of the Academic Committee meeting held on 2 November 2017 [AC Minutes 1-16, 2017-18].

18 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

[see Minute 20 below]

<p>Matters for discussion</p>

19

- 20.3 That the updated AC Annual Report 2016-17 be recommended for formal approval at the next AB meeting.

ACTION: AB Secretary

21 **ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17: UCL INNOVATION AND ENTERPRISE**
[PAPER 2-12 (17-18)]

- 21.1 **Received** – an oral introduction to the above paper by the Vice-Provost

- 23.4 The Director of SSW was aware of student concerns about waiting times at SPS and the Students' Union campaign to increase resources available at SPS in light of increasing demand. However, SSW had already implemented a number of changes to manage the demand from students for immediate and solution focused support. The Students' Union Sabbatical Officers appreciated the changes made by SSW as well all the work undertaken by SPS, but was campaigning due to student dissatisfaction in this area. AC considered that

26 ANNUAL REPORT FOR SESSION 2016-17 – EDUCATION COMMITTEE

31B Professor Dilly Fung

31B.1 Professor Dilly Fung would be leaving UCL to take up the post of Pro-Director for Education at the LSE. The Vice-Chair expressed his thanks on behalf of the committee to Professor Fung for her huge contribution to educational enhancement across UCL in leading the Arena Centre for Research-Based Education and wished her well in her new role.

32 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

32.1 The dates of upcoming AC meetings were as follows:

Thursday 14th June 2018, 10.00am

Thursday 1st November 2018, 10.00am.

DERFEL OWEN

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Chronic Underfunding of UCL's Student Psychological Services: A Reputational Liability

Introduction and context

The number of students choosing to disclose a mental health condition to their university has increased fivefold in the last decade; however, many universities have not increased their funding for on campus counselling in response. This is worsened by the fact that the National

The repercussions of this have naturally been severe for the UCL community. While we do not have quantifiable waiting times available for this report, research from the students' union indicates that most applicants wait between two and three months before the beginning of treatment. This is of course extremely poor by the standards of the sector; in May 2017, the *Guardian* reported the average waiting time for a university therapist to be 15 days, a figure drastically outstripped by UCL's.²

Additionally, a recent Freedom of Information Request confirmed that, in the year 2016-17, the service lacked the capacity to see 700, or 25 percent, of all those who registered for support.³ What happened to these students and whether they ever received treatment is unknown; certainly it has led to ballooning waiting times.

Inaction by UCL

The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) recommends a minimum ratio of counsellors to students of 1:1358.⁴ This would mean translate to 29.5 counsellors at UCL - or 16.4 more than is currently provided for.

The current recommendation suggested by the students' union, of 6.5 additional counsellors, is however much less than this, and is based on calculations devised in our 2016 *Heads Up* report.⁵ This would amount to approximately £340,000 in annual salary costs, a modest investment for an institution of UCL's turnover, and one that would provide a useful trial prior to considering HEPI's much more substantial recommendations.

These concerns have been raised repeatedly over the last two years, with over 2000 students signing a petition in early 2017 calling for additional resources for on campus counselling. Nevertheless, the union has been refused these resources at every turn.

The students' union does not recognise the modest number of changes made to UCL's mental health services to be a serious effort to deal with the crisis currently faced by the student community. In December 2017, the following reforms were announced by Student Support and Wellbeing:

- » Drop-in sessions with non-accredited Welfare Advisers;
- » Out-of-hours telephone counselling for all students;
- » An app to inform students of the support services;
- » An online digital CBT service.

Certainly, these are improvements to a service starved of necessary funding. But whereas they might be welcomed in good faith as complementary to a properly resourced service, they are not themselves a substitute for healthcare - which would mean readily available support from clinically trained therapists.

It is also the union's understanding that 2018 will see a triaging system rolled out in SPS as based upon the 'Cardiff model'; that is, where applicants are provided with an initial appointment soon

² <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/may/23/number-university-dropouts-due-to-mental-health-problems-trebles>

³ An FOI from August 2017 found 3054 registrations with SPS: https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/mental_health_statistics_30. Meanwhile, *Heads Up* identified the capacity of the service to be 2305.

⁴ <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/STRICTLY-EMBARGOED-UNTIL-22-SEPT-Hepi-Report-88-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ *Heads Up*.

after registration, followed by a tailored number of sessions as deemed appropriate by the specialist thereafter.

Mental health triaging in the context of a shortage of counsellors does, however, raise many

The students' union calls upon UCL Council to heed the requests of our academic community's students and staff, and to fund Student Psychological Services with the £340,000 we deem so vital.

Mark Crawford, Postgraduate Students' Officer, on behalf the Students' Union campaign UCL: Fund Our Mental Health Services.