

## Briefing: UCL Strategic Plan 2022-27

November 2021

Audience: Students' Union staff and officers

### Introduction

On 25 October 2021 UCL published two discussion papers on their Strategic plan in 2022-27, which feeds into *UCL 2034*, their long-term strategic plan for the institution.<sup>1</sup> The first paper serves as an introduction to the Strategic plan's vision, mission and values, as well as outlining the next stages in consulting on and producing the strategic plan ready for implementation next year.<sup>2</sup> The second paper, entitled *UCL Now*, provides an analysis of some of the contextual factors which might impact the implementation of the strategy.<sup>3</sup>

### UCL Now: Contextual factors to consider in the strategy

According to this discussion paper, *UCL Now* sets out to provide the necessary context for the implementation of the Strategic plan's vision, mission and values, aiming to “critically examine the size, shape and organisation with respect to these collective goals”. The contextual factors mentioned in this paper include:

- » **Covid-19:** Including remote learning (which the paper claims has provided opportunities for new skills in digital and blended learning) and an increase to the UCL student intake in 2020-21 and 2021-22.
- » **A changing global context:** Such as climate change, a polarisation of views in many societies, and technological change.
- » **Financial considerations for UCL:** Such as the withdrawal of capital fundings for universities in the 1990s, and the static levels of current undergraduate tuition fees as the cost of providing education increases.
- » **Location considerations:** Including the advantages of being in London for its diversity as well as the location of financial, creative and cultural industries.
- » **UCL's Growth:** Encompassing UCL's growth in student numbers, and the addition of more faculties, departments and institutes to the institution in recent years.
- » **Polycentricity:** UCL being an institution with a high degree of autonomy, diversity and creativity given to academic staff.
- » **Fragmented complexity:** The fact that there is often duplication, overlap and a lack of coordination in the delivery of key services and processes.
- » **Incoherent complexity:** A huge number of modules offered at UCL, and a significant number of students (47%) studying a combination of modules that is unique to them.

### Strategic plan: Vision

*“Our distinctive approach to research, education and innovation will further inspire our community of staff, students and partners to transform how the world is understood, how knowledge is created and shared and the way that global problems are solved.”*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/2034/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://bit.ly/3BwmTko>

<sup>3</sup> <https://liveuclac.sharepoint.com/sites/UCL-strategic-plan-2022-27/Discussion%20papers/UCL%20Now.pdf>

## Strategic plan: Mission

*“London’s Global University: a diverse intellectual community, engaged with the wider world and committed to changing it for the better; recognised for our radical and critical thinking and its widespread influence; with an outstanding ability to integrate our education, research, innovation and enterprise for the long-term benefit of humanity.”*

## Strategic plan: Values

The strategy paper published by UCL includes four core values, which according to its authors have “emerged in our initial conversations with the university community”, principally considering “the quality of (UCL’s) work and of (its) relationships”. The four values identified are:

- » **Integrity and mutual accountability:** The paper makes it clear that the institution should be transparent, stating that UCL “should be clear in relation to any university initiative where a decision has been taken in the institution, by whom it has been taken and on what basis, and who is responsible for its implementation”. Being realistic in delivery is also mentioned, with the paper explain how “it is essential that we are absolutely clear with staff, students, alumni, donors, and external organisations about what we can and cannot deliver as an organisation of limited resources and competing priorities, even when pressure exists to deliver the impossible”.
- » **Openness and inclusion:** Diversity in staff, the student body, and the academic and professional leadership group is described as an “absolute priority”. The paper also outlines a “duty to promote equality, both within and without the UCL community”, and eliminating both the awarding gap and discriminatory pay gaps is mentioned. The paper also pushes to “keenly protect methodological and ideological pluralism”, stating that the institution should guard against “intellectual groupthink”.
- » **Care and respect:** The paper highlights the importance of a “parity of esteem” between professional and academic staff. It also considers how intellectual disagreements should be handled, suggesting that “learning to disagree in a way that honours our commitments to integrity, care and respect” is essential. The paper also highlights the importance of listening and communication in disagreements, stressing the need to avoid “demonising the other”.
- » **Rigour and innovation:** The paper highlights the challenges of balancing work addressing “the complex problems of our communities, which is almost always cross-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary, and work within particular disciplinary traditions”. The idea of rigour is considered as “defining questions that can realistically be addressed, marshalling evidence required to answer them and, in the solution-focused space, an openness to innovation”.

## Next Steps

According to UCL, consultation will take place in three stages:

- » **Phase 1 (October – December 2021):** A discussion of the two recently-published papers on the vision, mission and values, and UCL Now.
- » **Phase 2 (January – April 2022):** A discussion of three papers; ‘Grand Challenges’ (to make the case that UCL should draw together its work in a small number of key thematic areas), ‘Areas of Disciplinary Focus’ (to make the case for strategic investment in particular areas of our work over the next five years), and ‘Education Priorities and Programmes’ (to consider UCL’s current approach to education and student life).
- » **Phase 3 (May – July 2022):** A discussion of two papers; ‘Enablers’ (to bring together different parts of UCL to respond to the academic priorities identified in Phase 2), and ‘UCL Shape and Size’ (to consider the ideal size and shape of student body both academically and in terms of revenue).