

The Vice-Chancellor's consultation on the future for the federal University

Preliminary analysis of responses

Purpose

1. This document provides a brief preliminary analysis of the responses received to the Vice-Chancellor's consultation on the future for the federal University.
2. It suggests five key areas in which further analysis of responses and exploration of ways to proceed is required. It recommends that more detailed analysis is carried out over the next three months, in consultation with Heads of Colleges, with a view to presenting a full report to the Heads of Colleges Committee when it meets in October, when recommendations on how to take matters forward will be agreed for consideration by the University Council.

Background

3. The Vice-Chancellor's consultation on the future for the federal University opened at the end of February and closed on 27 May 2005. At the time of writing, eight responses had been received after the closing date and have been included in the analysis with the Vice-Chancellor's permission. It has also been agreed that Colleges may submit supplementary comments to the Vice-Chancellor, reporting the outcome of any further discussions which may have arisen at meetings of Governing Bodies during June/July 2005.
4. The consultation paper aimed to prompt reflection upon the values and aims of the federal University in a rapidly changing Higher Education landscape and to seek views on how the federal University of London can be strengthened to the benefit of the Colleges and their staff and students.
5. More specifically, comments were invited on the ways in which the central University and the Colleges can work together more effectively, both academically and administratively, in a range of key areas.
6. These key areas were:
 - i. the ethos and membership of the University of London;
 - ii. ways of promoting the University of London nationally and internationally;
 - iii. the role and provision of centrally-provided services.

Responses to the consultation

7. The Vice-Chancellor received 43 responses: 11 from Colleges of the University (9 from individual Colleges and 2 from consortia of Colleges), 17 from other groups within the University, and 15 from individuals.
8. At the time of writing, two Colleges had not yet formally responded to the consultation paper, either individually or as part of a consortium of Colleges.
9. Although not formally submitted to the consultation, the Provost of UCL circulated a discussion paper which raised many important issues relating to the future of the federal University. These issues have been given consideration in the following analysis.
10. Among the 17 group responses (other than those from Colleges), 5 were from groups located in the Colleges (including 2 student unions), 8 were from federal Committees of the University, 3 were from groups within the central University and 1 was from the School of Advanced Study.
11. Among the 15 individual respondents, 11 were from individuals in the Colleges and 4 from individuals in the central University. 13 were staff and 2 were students.
12. 18 respondents preferred not to use the proforma (9 Colleges or consortia of Colleges, 2 individuals and 7 groups).

Views expressed in the responses

General comments

13. The majority of the responses were supportive of the federal University and its continuation. However, there were many criticisms, principally of the governance arrangements, the organisation and effectiveness of centrally-provided services and of failure to maximise opportunities for academic collaboration in teaching and research.
14. A few respondents criticised the consultation paper, which it was felt assumed shared attitudes regarding the merits of a federal system.

Key points

A. The ethos and membership of the University

15. The majority of responses expressed the view that the purpose of the federal University, and of the central University (as the embodiment of the federal University), must be to serve the needs of the Colleges. This principle, it was suggested, should be more explicitly communicated across the federation.
16. Several respondents noted that improved communication between the central University and the Colleges is needed and that a reciprocal relationship based on shared principles and around appropriate structures will be required to make this possible and build confidence.

Academic collaboration in teaching and research

17. The consultation paper posed questions about the potential for expanding current intercollegiate teaching and research initiatives, primarily jointly taught courses (undergraduate and postgraduate), intercollegiate provision of research training and joint research projects.
18. Views on this formed a prominent part of the responses, of which all but five gave it consideration. The majority supported the proposal of investigating the potential for greater academic collaboration, which, it was observed, underpins the broader ethos of the federal University and is uniquely facilitated by the existence of the University of London degree.
19. On the other hand, some others expressed the view that the federal University has no academic role and adds little to the academic endeavours of the Colleges. Six or so others could be described as being ambivalent on this issue.
20. The responses expressed a general consensus that the central administration should not be an instigator, or mediator, of academic collaborations, which should be led by academics and academic departments. However, it was recognised that a degree of central facilitation could be valuable.
21. Some drew the distinction between teaching and research collaboration, with most regarding collaboration in teaching (undergraduate and Masters degrees) and the provision of conferences, seminars and non-specialist training for postgraduate students provided by the School of Advanced Study as the greatest areas of potential.

Expansion of the University of London

22. The vast majority of responses were cautiously supportive of further expansion of the University of London, as long as academic standards were maintained and 'brand dilution' did not occur.
23. In general, there was greater support for admitting small specialist institutions rather than multi-faculty universities which already hold their own degree-awarding powers.

B. Promoting the University of London nationally and internationally

24. The consultation paper posed questions on whether the University centrally could have an enhanced role, on behalf of the Colleges, in the promotion of the University of London brand, and whether activities such as the website, Taster Courses and Open Days should be further developed.
25. Significant tensions were observed by some between the brand of the Colleges and that of the University of London. For this reason, some larger Colleges choose not to refer to their membership of the University of London in their promotional literature, whereas others, some small, some large, give it prominence.
26. Some respondents stressed the value of the outstanding reputation of the University of London degree and, therefore, the associated branding, as an important factor in the recruitment of staff and students. Others disagreed with this analysis and stated that the competing brands of the Colleges and the University created undesirable confusion.

27. Most responses suggested that the website should play a role in promoting the Colleges of the University of London and should continue to act as a portal to the websites of the Colleges. The Taster Courses and Open Days were supported by all the Student Unions that responded, but some others were less supportive of these initiatives.

C. The role and provision of centrally-provided services

28. The consultation paper discussed the role of centrally-provided services and invited respondents to comment on their experience as users of the central University's current activities with suggestions for reform.

29. Many respondents raised concerns that centrally-provided services did not offer value-for-money and were not subject to adequate standards of transparency.

30. Several centrally-provided services, and in particular the Senate House Library, the Careers Group and the central Accommodation Office were praised by the several respondents as valued services.

31. Some Colleges noted the importance of centrally-provided services, which allowed them to provide services to students that otherwise they could not afford and achieve economies of scale. On the other hand, other Colleges questioned the value of some services. Several responses noted the importance of avoiding a 'one size fits all' approach to the relationship between the individual Colleges and the centre.

Governance arrangements

32. The issue of governance was not specifically identified for comment in the consultation paper. However it emerged as a significant concern among respondents, particularly the Colleges.

33. It was felt that the current governance arrangements neither reflect the nature of the University today nor involve the Heads of Colleges to an acceptable degree. In particular, the University's governance structure is that of a large unitary university and is not suitably tailored to the unique needs of the federation. Several respondents regarded this as a situation requiring urgent attention.

34. In particular, several respondents noted that some committees of the University had internal management functions for the central University, and that these need to be separated from those committees with a federal remit.

Next steps

35. Five priority areas have been identified, in which further detailed analysis and investigation are required. These are:

- i. forming a consensus on the missions of both the federal University and the central University, with the emphasis that the University of London is a family of world-class institutions and is principally the aggregation of the strengths and achievements of its member institutions;
- ii. reviewing governance arrangements;
- iii. investigating the potential for further academic collaboration in teaching and research;

- iv. reviewing the organisational efficiency (both financial and operational) and effectiveness of centrally-provided services;
 - v. management of the University of London brand and associated promotional activities.
36. Several responses stressed the need for an ongoing dialogue on how any reforms should be approved and implemented. Further consideration of the responses is required before any decision can be reached on the most appropriate way to proceed. Such decisions will be made in consultation with the Heads of Colleges Committee and the University Council.
37. Relevant comments raised in the responses will be fed into other reviews currently taking place, particularly the Review of the External System, the Heads of Colleges Subscription Working Group and Phase Two of the Corporate Reorganisation Project (due to begin in September 2005). Views on specific issues such as the development of the University of London website and the organisation of Taster Courses and Open Days will be made available to those with responsibilities in these areas.

Timetable

38. The review of the governance arrangements has been initiated by the Central Secretariat after initial consultation with the HEFCE. A first report will be presented to the Heads of Colleges Committee in October.
39. The Heads of Colleges Subscription Working Group will start a series of meetings in September with a view to presenting progress reports on new arrangements for the Subscription and the payments for Central Services for implementation from the beginning of the 2006-07 Financial Year.
40. A bid has been made to the HEFCE for support for an officer to facilitate the further development of collaborations between the Colleges – additionally the Vice-Chancellor will be approaching the Heads of Colleges seeking a secondment, to be supported by the Vice-Chancellor's Development Fund, to work centrally on enhancing collaborations. This activity is expected to continue at a high level throughout the next two years.
41. The Director of Administration has in place the Corporate Reorganisation Implementation Board (CRIB) (with input from the Colleges) which is taking forward the relocations and restructuring in Senate House and Stewart House and which will identify potential operational cost savings. Information from CRIB will feed into the deliberations of the Working Group on the Subscription.