

Merger: Convinced yet?

Thanks for all the positive feedback on the first bulletin, please keep them coming in. This issue has a view from a student, which we believe is an accurate reflection of the majority opinion, a roundup of the first two Town Hall meetings, the view from Professional Staff, more on the Organisation Review and the experience of staff from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education which merged into the University of Toronto. And finally some UCL / IOE comparisons.

Town Hall Meetings

The first two Town Hall meetings (which were in reality a Q&A with the Director), have attracted around 50 staff. Overwhelmingly the questions from the floor have expressed little appetite let alone enthusiasm for the proposal and raised many concerns about the consequences for the direction of the IOE.

Widening access and participation and social justice

This has been a constant thread so far and, it is only when pushed by questioning that we get the response “of course we see that as crucial”, but the main argument in the proposal is a financial one. Of course it can be argued that without the finances, one cannot have an institution that defends and espouses these ‘core values’, but it is in the consultation very much a second order consideration.

Our concerns on this are hardly upheld when one looks at the UCL Strategic plan, which places these issues as a footnote. For those interested, it can be found at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/white-paper/10-year-strategy-principles/provost-white-paper.pdf>.

What’s the rush?

Interestingly at one of the Town Hall meetings, the question raised in the last Bulletin, of the relationship of the timing of the merger to the REF and Global League tables, it was stated that if the merger is not completed by December 15th, then the IOE would not be lumped in with UCL in the league tables, though it was also said that this was not a deal breaker.

There is strong feeling that there is an unseemly rush, and not enough consideration is being taken to get this right and much will be lost as a consequence.

Principles first, details later

The way in which the proposal is laid out, whereby Council is to make a decision ‘in principle’ in April and then sort out the details later is seen by many staff as being highly problematic.

With so few details, not just on the terms and conditions of staff at a very different institution, but also fundamental issues such as the Resource Allocation Model whereby money is top-sliced from departments to allow them for instance the flexibility to recruit and retain staff, carry over contracts at the end of funding, i.e. to retain the intellectual and physical capacity which underpins the continuity of academic excellence.

There is a strong feeling that once the irrevocable decision has been taken in May, the balance of power will firmly be in UCL’s hands and that assurances of getting the best deal and of equal partners will not be worth the paper that they are written on.

Meaningful consultation!

The process so far has not been encouraging. What weight are the Town Hall meetings being given? Will more be given to the written consultation?

UCU Members Meeting

Wednesday 12 March

12:30 – 13:30

Room S16, Students Union

UCU members in professional services have mixed views about the proposed merger.

UCL offers better career prospects and a more prestigious employer for the CV, say those in favour. Those against would rather stay in a smaller, more personal organisation. But the issue is irrelevant if we end up being sacked as a result of the merger.

- It has been stated that around £40 million will be released for the IOE to spend, of which £22 million will come from spending down our reserves.
- If the other £20 million will come from cost savings, and it has been stated that 'no redundancies are envisaged as a result of the merger, where are these savings envisaged coming from?
- How will a review of "administrative requirements for the new faculty" be conducted and on what terms?
- Who will do the work needed to harmonise IOE and UCL professional services? Will it be existing staff on top of their day jobs?
- Is it reasonable to expect that that turnover at UCL will absorb the inevitable 'deletion of posts', as a result of what may be interpreted as duplication of functions' as a result of merger?
- And what choice will staff have? Will staff be in effect forcibly deployed to areas they have not wished to work in because they are 'admin staff who can be moved around at will'?

Staff working in a world-class centre for social science research methods, expect to be told:

1. The specific questions the consultation is addressing;
2. How data (i.e. staff and student feedback) will be recorded, analysed, reported and responded to.

The Director's February "All staff" email touched on these topics and we understand he will reveal more shortly.

Organisational Review

Is pooling programme administrators a good idea?

In the run-up to the proposed merger, management are implementing the recommendations of an organisational review.

An experienced programme administrator (PA), with an HR background, puts the case against one of the key recommendations.

"I am concerned that management want to remove PAs from programme teams and pool them. I believe this will lead to a worse service for students, academics and external partners. And that it will worsen working conditions for PAs.

Pooling is likely to lead to:

- demands to standardise the PA's role, despite the fact that there are significant differences between the different programmes, leaders and their students;
- a loss of local knowledge, resulting in a less responsive service;
- an increase in PA workloads, resulting in stress, higher turnover and the emergence of a blame culture, as we are put under increasing pressure;
- students and academics on smaller programmes having to "fight" for PA support when resources are short;
- loss of close working relationships between programme teams and administrators, resulting in poorer communication, commitment and job satisfaction".

Research administrators share similar concerns about the proposal to pool them.

Lessons from the OISE–University of Toronto merger

What follows is the story of the merger of OISE with the University of Toronto (U of T), which happened 17 years ago, told by two colleagues who have worked at OISE since before the merger.

Ostensibly the merger was to give OISE faculty security but there were other reasons. U of T wanted the OISE building

Was it a success? It depends who you ask.

Senior admin who orchestrated the merger would call it a resounding success ...

Faculty at OISE would call it a dismal failure because they lost their independence, were marginalized in the new institution, and witnessed the deterioration of the programs.

Students, both graduate and teacher education, saw the calibre of their programs decline. For example, teacher education courses are now taught almost exclusively by contract instructors. Most teacher ed. students complete their entire program without being taught by a (tenure) full-time faculty.

The practice teaching component of the program went from a strong partnership between the Faculty of Education and local schools to a complete breakdown of the relationship so that student teachers are placed randomly in schools.

Beyond the merging of vastly different programs, the cultures of the two institutions were very different; both were very good institutions with positive cultures.

Almost immediately after the merger there was uneasiness between the two groups which deteriorated to one of distrust and dissatisfaction. To successfully

merge different cultures there must be strong leadership, a safe space to sort out issues, transparency ... None of this happened. 17 years later – the merger was only good for a few select individuals. ...

This has resulted in truly a two-tier system – those in teacher ed. are second class citizens with a much higher workload (classes are much larger), tend to not be respected, and are not in positions of responsibility/decision-making. (Those who teach in the graduate program often refer to those of us in teacher ed. as “schoolies.”)

As I read your draft document I had a few more thoughts.

- Once you are part of a much larger institution you lose decision-making powers that you probably take for granted;
- Losing our independence also played itself out in ways that were unimaginable. I witnessed first-hand what it is like to be an administrator in a large university that has generic rules. In short we cannot be nimble and responsive because we need to comply with externally-developed policies;
- The place of OISE within the university is questioned and questionable. We know education is not respected in the wider society – just read any newspaper article on education. That negative attitude pervades the university’s attitude towards education. Like the government (just think Michael Gove) they do not understand the complexity of education. As a result, our relationship with the university is characterized by uneasiness – they think we need to be told what to do and we feel misunderstood;
- A school of education is not like other faculties or departments because of the nature of our program. Education is a complex process and schools of education must engage in a different set of practices than found in other departments; however, from my experience the university is not interested in learning about or accepting the unique needs of a school of education;
- Your faculty should not be romantic about being part of the larger university system. Large organizations are top-down and systematized. IOE is world renowned. You do not need to be part of a university for more prestige.

No one at IOE should underestimate the importance of having your independence. You will go from being a prestigious international institution to the bottom of the heap in the university.

Students respond to the merger

News of the potential merger between IOE and UCL came as a surprise to many IOE students. In many cases, students came to know of plans from external media sources, quickly followed up with communications from the IOE directorate and Students’ Union. This order of events has undoubtedly affected the nature of the student response, the mood of which can be described as apprehensive.

The merger proposals have been presented to students as out of their hands, thus excluding the major input of student voices to the actual decision-making process; this has been explained on the basis of confidentiality and commercial sensitivity.

Students have been given the opportunity to feedback their initial thoughts and questions on the merger at consultation sessions, which were requested by and run from the Students’ Union. This piece attempts to account for the student voices that have been heard across these initial consultations.

The primary question raised by students has been on the subject of how the merger will affect the awarding of their qualifications; simply put, which institutional branding will appear on their degree certificate?

The UCL name undoubtedly appeals to certain cohorts of students, namely international students for whom the worldwide renown of UCL holds promising prospects for employment, and interdisciplinary students for whom the education signifier is less vital. Taking into account positive comments on the merger, this is the single most common aspect of enthusiasm.

The student reaction has been mixed in relation to the merger proposal, with common worries expressed about the future autonomy of the IOE. Will the IOE retain its distinct branding? Will the mission, values and ethos be compromised? Will existing fee structures and admissions policies be standardised with UCL’s existing frameworks? Will the physical infrastructure and provision of student services be preserved within the IOE campus?

Given that the identity of the IOE and therefore of each IOE student has been shaped by the distinctiveness of the shared IOE ethos as set apart from other institutions, a merger of this kind unsettles the very core of student experience. The logistical and practical concerns aside, at least part of the anxiety that students are expressing is in relation to the more intangible aspects of institutional belonging, such as learning environment, academic cultures, intellectual community, and affinity with ethics and values.

Last but not least are a very valid set of concerns around the consultation process. The IOE student body is unique in its capacity to know and understand the processes of educational institutions and policy.

Simply addressing students with information and conducting consultations that take the form of a

listening exercise does not utilise the range of skills and expertise that the students could bring to the discussion.

Neither does it reassure us that the consultations are truly meaningful, or that the student voice will have an impact on any of the decisions being made.

IOE's ethos, culture and identity as seen by Professional Staff

Compared with working in a large, multi-faculty university, we have a strong identity and can offer unique support, particularly for our students. They may well wish to have UCL after their names but will the quality of their experience here suffer?

As one member of staff puts it:

'Many professional staff chose to work at IOE because of the ethos and uniqueness of the place. I would hope the SLT will strive to retain as much of the IOE culture as possible.'

What's a University for?

The announcement that the IOE is now ranked 1st in the 2014 QS World University Rankings is to be welcomed as is the statement that they "are a testament to the dedication and expertise of our staff and students".

As the views from students and the report from OISE in this Bulletin make clear, the aspirations of those working in education and social sciences is firmly rooted in advancing social justice and societal change.

There is much mistrust and scepticism that this **will be** sustainable once absorbed into a mega-faculty institution such as UCL.

The responses so far at the initial Director's Address, the consultation document or the Town Hall meetings have failed to offer up a convincing vision for what the IOE is and should be.

TUPE

As highlighted in the last Bulletin, the changes in TUPE are far less favourable than previously (for what they were worth!), the offer of security for a single year is little comfort for staff with mortgages and rent to pay.

The lack of detail and assurance is rightly making many staff very nervous about their own futures in Higher Education.

We expect the promise made at the Town Hall meeting to provide a statement on what the IOE's position is.

If you have comments or wish to contribute to the next Bulletin, please send them to the UCU Branch Chair at c.owen@ioe.ac.uk.

UCL Facts

Annual Leave

- UCL standard days leave 27
- IOE standard days leave 30

Hours of Work

- UCL standard working week 36.5
- IOE standard working week 35.0

UCL Statutes

IOE's Statute 1 defines "Academic Staff" to include "Research Staff":

"Subject to Statute 17 "Academic Staff" means the Director, the Deputy Director, and all persons holding full-time posts or part-time posts equivalent to one-third time or more as Professor, Reader, Senior Lecturer, Lecturer or member of the Research Staff, or holding such a post at the professorial level, or appointed to such other posts or grades of post as the Council on the recommendation of the Senate may determine."

Whereas, UCL's Statutes do not include Research Staff (explicitly) within the definition of Academic Staff:

"Academic Staff" means (subject to Statute 18) all persons holding appointments of Professor, Reader, Senior Lecturer, Senior Clinical Lecturer, Lecturer or Clinical Lecturer tenable at the College or persons holding the appointment of Honorary Senior Clinical Lecturer (as defined by Regulation) at the College, or any other individuals holding an appointment (including honorary appointment) designated as an appointment on the Academic Staff of the College by the Council, or any other categories of staff designated Academic Staff of the College by the Council."

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UCU is the largest post-school union in the world: a force working for education that your employer and the government cannot ignore.

Locally we represent all Grade 6 and above members of staff and will be fighting to ensure your conditions of service are secured. And, of course, the more members UCU has, the more effective the support and protection we offer will be.

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/join>
