

Merger: Negotiation Time

Thanks for all the feedback on the second bulletin, and nice to see them pinned up next to desks.

This edition contains our submission to the Consultation, an overview of the differences between IoE and UCL in equalities, the view from Initial Teacher Education and some thoughts on what a University is For

UCU Response to Consultation

Formally UCU (IOE) has not taken a view on whether we are in favour of or opposed to the proposed merger. We do not consider that we are yet in the position to evaluate if the merger provides a better option for staff and students: (a) professionally (b) academically and (c) with no deterioration in both the short and longer term for terms and conditions of employment.

After two months, a Director's presentation, four Town Hall meetings and a joint UCL/IOE Provost/Directors meeting one would have hoped for more answers and more clarity on the original proposal outlined in the UCL and the IOE: Closer Institutional Alignment document.

The headlines on our Merger Bulletins, "Merger, but on what terms?" and "Merger: Convinced yet?" sum up to our minds the lack of substance in the ten pages of responses to questions raised at Town Hall meetings, and the concerns amongst staff and students.

Our starting point is that of Richard Aldrich, who in *The Institute of Education 1902-2002 A Centenary History* sums up by saying:

"What is clear, however, is that in the future, as in the past, the Institute's ability successfully to respond to change and to continue to provide academic and professional leadership in education will depend principally upon the quality and commitment of its staff and students."

The decision to agree in principle and then sort out the details before a formal vote to dissolve the IOE into UCL (albeit now deferred to October) has been unhelpful at the very least, and is, we believe, fundamentally misconceived.

We do not consider that any 'in principle' decision can or should be made by IOE Council until Council, staff and students are given the information that would enable a proper evaluation of the gains and losses of the proposed merger. It is the details – in other words, what the concrete effects of the merger would be for the IOE, its staff and students – that must inform decisions about the 'principle' of the merger.

In the most recent consultation document, to which we are responding, it is reported that an undertaking has been given that the 'name and identity of the IOE will be protected'. But what is understood to be the 'identity' of the IOE is not made explicit.

Because of this, what we propose is that negotiations on the substance of the merger need to take place, and be properly reported to all interested parties, before Council can or should agree to the merger.

Academic Staff

On the one hand, there is a view expressed that little will change in the short to medium term for most academic staff, e.g. *UCL and the IOE: Closer Institutional Alignment 4.4.1*, though with quite clear caveats.

Specifically, many academic staff whose research and teaching is strongly rooted in the Humanities were less, rather than more, reassured following the joint presentation with the Provost of UCL, where the IoE's work in social science was repeatedly mentioned, but no reference at all was made to work in the foundation disciplines of education.

Research Staff are rightly deeply concerned at their position within UCL as currently defined in the UCL Statutes. The response in Notes of "town hall" meetings held on 18 and 25 February and 3 and 12 March 2014 Note 28

"The issues around this are complex and again needs to be negotiated carefully over the next few weeks before the decision in principle is made."

This does not offer a satisfactory response for the very large numbers of staff affected and sits at odds with the view stated many times through the Proposal document concerning the central importance of research staff in a merged organisation.

Professional Staff

Professional members of staff, especially those in Professional Services, are presented with a far less certain future.

It is instructive to listen to the views of those members of (primarily Professional) staff who have recently taken Voluntary Severance. Their farewell speeches reflected on in many cases long years of productive and enjoyable work at IOE, and concluded that the uncertainty outside of a working life outside of the IOE was preferable to that being offered at UCL.

These are sentiments strongly felt by all staff, but especially by those in professional roles, and the responses to the Town Hall meetings have done little to allay these fears, e.g. Notes of “town hall” meetings held on 18 and 25 February and 3 and 12 March 2014 Note 30.

“Detailed discussion is needed to get the appropriate balance of central and local services and this will vary in the different services. It is considered that there will be significant gains from having some services centrally but this is a matter for careful negotiation and there might be a range of ways of achieving the best configuration.”

Teacher Education

There is a keen awareness amongst staff that there are (conservatively) hundreds of thousands of people in the UK and internationally who have been taught by teachers trained at the IOE, and that this strong tradition of teacher education is one of the hallmarks of the IOE’s identity and reputation as a centre for excellence.

In this context, the omission in the verbal presentation and in the notes of the UCL Provost’s meeting of any mention of Teacher Education and of the strong research base across disciplines in both the humanities and the social sciences that informs this work, has done little to convince staff that the merger would place what is still a Core activity of the Institute in a “safe pair of hands”.

At the heart of the proposal is an assumption that the IOE cannot sustain itself as an independent body in today’s economic climate, e.g.

“We have to accept that the period of direct public funding is over and we have to learn to operate differently”

“Because of the volatile environment, it is not a choice between merger with UCL and business as usual.”

The proposal does not explain why these features of the terrain of higher education would be any different were we to be merged with UCL, nor why, in a political climate that is itself highly volatile and potentially likely to change following next years’ elections, these economic forecasts should be treated as definitive.

Reconfiguration

The emphasis at UCL Provost’s meeting on QSS, SSRU and TCRU was at variance with the Notes of “town hall” meetings held on 18 and 25 February and 3 and 12 March 2014 Note 37 on ‘cherry picking’. It might and probably does make sense for these individual departments and research centres to find more amenable homes outside of the “Education Faculty”, but that is of obvious concern to those staff left and the long term viability, academic identity and

ethos of the faculty formerly known as the Institute of Education.

Values, ethics and Widening Participation

There is a body of values which are “in a non trivial way are embedded in the history of the IOE”, those of social justice, the approach to ethical oversight of research and of lowering the barriers of entry to education. The Proposal and the responses fail to address how these are to be sustained in a multi-faculty institution, especially one like UCL whose entrance requirements, on the face of it, do not seem to reflect the same kind of commitment to widening participation as that of the IOE.

Organisational Independence

This is stated often, but rarely backed up, when one considers staff in Professional roles, Research Staff with a status ‘in limbo’, and the lack of clarity on which Faculty staff would be located in as a result of ‘reconfiguration’. As several staff have pointed out, it is essential to have a full picture as to what exactly this “organizational independence” would consist in, at the level of, for example, control of budgets, teaching provision, student entitlements, admissions criteria, research ethics, academic structure, etc.

Terms and Conditions

Should the in principle vote be carried at the Council Meeting, UCU would expect that we will be invited to negotiations on the terms and conditions that would apply to transfer and safeguards for staff who change contracts post merger, especially as a result of the unspecified ‘re-configurations’.

Equalities IOE & UCL

The current proposal is for the Institute of Education to become a Faculty of UCL should the merger go ahead. It is difficult to assess the potential advantages and disadvantages of such a proposal without more information being presented to staff about the current organisational structure of UCL. It may be helpful to know that faculties are not the highest unit of organisation in UCL; ten faculties are currently linked to three main Schools.

It is likely that, if the merger were to go ahead, the Institute of Education would be located as a new faculty within the School of Arts & Humanities, Laws, Social & Historical Sciences. Staff will be aware that the IOE is currently dismantling its faculty structure. Should UCL adopt a similar approach to re-structuring in the future, the IOE as an autonomous institution would clearly be at risk.

Further, in terms of staff numbers, the most recent data shows that IOE employs 400 academic staff, 560 professional staff and 90 associates (a total of 1050 staff)¹. This would make it by far the largest faculty within the School of Arts and Social Sciences, and the fourth largest faculty of UCL as a whole. These figures give strong support to the argument that, if the proposed merger goes ahead, the IOE should have the status of a School, and not merely a faculty, within the organisational structure of UCL.

¹ Source: Report on Equality Data – Staff, presented to Equality and Diversity Committee, October 2013.

Flexibility and hierarchy

UCU at the IOE has won significant gains over the years to protect the individual and collective terms and conditions of staff. A previous bulletin on the proposed merger noted that researchers at UCL are not considered academic members of staff and this has generated concern among researchers at the IOE about the extent to which their status as academic members of staff will be protected, post-merger. Concerns have also been expressed about the general lack of information about the terms and conditions of staff at UCL and how these compare with those of staff at the IOE.

The UCL HR website shows that, compared with staff at the IOE, staff at UCL are employed on a more highly differentiated range of contracts with implications for the status and conditions of employment for large numbers of staff. For example, the total number of **researchers** employed by UCL², **66% are employed as associates**. Researchers are employed on associate contracts at all levels of seniority (e.g. senior, principal, professorial, clinical and non-clinical research posts). This is a far higher proportion of staff on associate contracts than at the IOE, (9%).

Further, and in relation to **teaching**, a substantial number of employees at UCL are employed on **teaching fellowships or as tutors** 7% of all staff employed at UCL. There is no IOE equivalent to UCL teaching fellowships.

In relation to professional staff at the IOE, views have been expressed about the potential for greater job opportunities resulting from the proposed merger, as well as the risks for potential redundancies. Some staff are also worried that they will find themselves working in a centralised pool of support staff, with consequent loss of job satisfaction.

Of the total number of 'administrative/managerial support' staff working at UCL, only a small proportion (6%) work in the School of Arts and Social Sciences (where the IOE is likely to be based, should the merger go ahead). Just over a third of 'administrative / managerial support' staff work in the School of Life and Medical Sciences. The largest proportion (43%) is located in 'Professional Services' outside of the faculties, which suggests that support services are indeed highly centralised at UCL. 'Town Hall' meetings at the IOE have failed to explicitly rule out redundancies for any category of staff, post-merger, 'as parts of the two organisations are drawn closer together'.

Contracts

Aside from a wider variety of roles and greater differences in status between different categories of staff at UCL compared with IOE, it is also of concern that UCL utilises a wide variety of contracts of employment, including:

- **Open-ended with grant/project end dates:** appointments with a known risk of redundancy;
- **Open-ended:** where expectation that employment will continue indefinitely;
- **Open-ended (term-time or seasonal):** for 'those working for the majority of the academic year (i.e. 9 months or more) will be paid continuously over 12 months. Those working less than 9 months in every

² Source: UCL Staff Numbers and FTE by Staff Group and Occupational Type, 30.9.2013.

12-month period may be paid in instalments over the months that they work, or continuously over 12 months'.

Additionally, under the terms of UCL's Work-Life Balance policy, core hours are identified as 10am-4pm. A number of different working arrangements are also provided for, as follows:

- flexi-time
- annualised hours;
- term-time working;
- shift working;
- staggered hours;
- job-share;
- part-time working; compressed hours;
- career breaks; and planned remote working.

It should be noted that while academic, research and support staff on Grades 7 and above are eligible for Time Off in Lieu (TOIL), they are not expected to be included in flexi-time or annualised hours schemes.

While these options may be attractive to some employees, it will be important to find out what these arrangements entail in practice, and to ensure that greater flexibility does not translate into poorer quality jobs with inferior terms and conditions compared with those currently available to staff at the IOE.

Equalities Profile

In general, UCL has collated more detailed information on the equalities profile of their employees, compared with the IOE. However, the IOE would appear to be better at collecting data on disabled staff and in recording information on LGBT members of staff. As a result of these differences, in this bulletin we will spotlight gender in the workplace. In subsequent bulletins, we will compare other dimensions of equality and social justice at the IOE and UCL.

Gender

At the two highest grades (9 and 10), only 31% of staff at UCL are female³. This compares less favourably with the IOE, where the majority of staff (63%) at grades 9 and 10 are female.⁴

It might be assumed that this gender gap could be attributed to the concentration of science-oriented faculties in UCL. However, at researcher level, there is gender parity in terms of the total number of male and female researchers employed at UCL and that women represent more than half of researchers in seven of the ten faculties, including all four faculties of the School of Life and Medical Sciences. Data suggest a significant barrier for women in moving up into academic posts⁵. For example, in relation to academic posts in the School of Life and Medical Sciences, the proportion of female staff drops to 27%, 28%, 35% and 45% in the faculties of Brain Sciences, Life Sciences, Medical Sciences and Population Health Sciences respectively⁶.

³ UCL Equalities website, accessed 1.3.14

⁴ IOE Report on Equality Data – Staff, Equalities and Diversity Committee, October 2013.

⁵ Defined by UCL as comprising Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Reader and Professor posts.

⁶ Source: UCL Staff Numbers by Gender, Staff Group and Faculty/Service Area, as at 30.9.13

The view from ITE

Chris Husbands assured us we were not on a 'burning platform' at the last Town Hall Meeting (12/3/14) but his take on our current position seems to suggest that we are - despite our QS ranking as the world's leading centre for education and applied social science and our outstanding Ofsted ratings. Obviously the funding pressures, including the uncertainty about the future of HE based Initial Teacher Education are real concerns.

But he was not able to give us a guarantee that these uncertainties would be much mitigated by becoming part of a bigger institution – certainly not in terms of our job security. It may be that if we merge the IoE will be able to draw on reserves to make '20 Bedford Way' fit for purpose and conference ready but obviously that won't ensure that our outstanding PGCE courses still run and that we are able to make a difference in the sphere of education.

The director was keen to convince Ofsted inspectors that the IoE had played a significant role in the success of London schools in the last decade. Given our reputation and our role in teacher education in this country it is unclear why the IoE is not engaged in a more public debate about the value of HE based ITE.

We should be leading a vigorous campaign to secure its future, given our reputation. Not to do so seems to be a dereliction of our responsibilities to London schools, to the student teachers of the future, to school students and those who care about them - and to those of us employed in ITE.

Here are some of the concerns that PGCE student teachers have expressed:

"I applied to the IOE because of its fantastic reputation as the best place to train in the country."

"The feedback from people who had previously completed my chosen course was extremely positive and I felt the Institute would offer me the best possible start to my teaching career. I feel concerned about the merger between IoE and UCL because I wouldn't want the Institute to lose its unique identity. The fact that the IoE is a relatively small body has made my experience of studying here very enjoyable, as I have felt very supported during the initial stages of my PGCE."

"Institutes and colleges are no longer seen as equals in the field of higher education providers and it saddens me that the IOE must surrender its individuality to keep up in the competitive race. This is not what the IOE was about when I joined. Is the financial promise even worth it? We already have such wonderful assets. We can be certain we will lose our autonomy and identity, not to mention the possibility of staff that have always done so much for education! We cannot be certain there will be any benefits for IOE as a result and what a shame it would be to lose everything we are so proud of as students here!"

The current 'consultation' about the merger has not created space for us to engage in debates about the work that we do and how we might be best placed to pursue it – and whether the proposed merger really addresses these concerns.

What's a University for?

While our immediate concern is with members' pay and conditions, most of us who work in universities do so out of a commitment to a set of values that go far deeper than the practical questions to do with our conditions of employment. These values, including collegiality, intellectual freedom, the advancement of scholarship, and a concern with the quality and nature of education, are intertwined with the idea of a university as a public good.

In the current political climate, many of us worry that it is this very idea that is being eroded by changes to funding regimes, forms of accountability, and managerial structures. While we recognise the need to ensure the financial viability of the IoE, we also believe that academics have an important role to play in articulating and defending the idea of a university as a public good, and the intrinsic values and ethos that go along with it.

The statement that the key reasons for the proposed merger with UCL are "A once in a generation investment opportunity"; "A vision for academic growth" "Enhancing student experience", and "A stronger brand" suggests that the engineers of this merger proposal are driven more by the pressure to conform to a narrow business model of higher education institutions than by the need to challenge it and to defend the idea that academic institutions should embody a set of aspirations and values that go beyond the instrumental economic viewpoint reflected in notion such as "brand" and "growth".

These are, as our Director frequently reminds, challenging times for higher education. Yet as Stefan Collini has argued (in his 2012 book, *What are Universities for?*) "Amidst the uncertainties currently facing universities, the only certain thing is that these are all problems which will be exacerbated rather than solved by placing them in the lap of a deity called 'the market'".

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.

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