The Challenges of Developing and Implementing the UCL International Strategy

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The context

Internationalisation is one of the major issues in universities around the world. Furthermore, over the last several years, education has moved from being an international *activity* to being an international *priority*. Both in the developed world and the developing countries, governments place education at the heart of their missions. In the UK, for instance, when Tony Blair brought Labour to power, one of his most potent rallying cries was 'Education, Education, Education'. The main driver behind the privatisation of education (at all levels) is to prepare work forces for economies which are increasingly knowledge-based and innovation-based and thereby to promote wealth creation. However, education is now more and more being seen also as highly significant in terms of its ability to improve quality of life and inter-cultural understanding.

In economic terms, it has been estimated that the provision of educational services and related activity is now one of the UK's key export earners with revenues estimated at c.£28 billion per annum.[2] Internationalisation of universities has become a priority across the globe as universities and national governments recognise the financial and cultural benefits in the short-term and also the long-term economic, diplomatic and inter-cultural benefits of having increasingly diverse student bodies and academic work-forces. Over the last few

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[1] Michael Worton: Vice-Provost, UCL

[2] Dr Pamela Lenton: British Council Report: *The Value of UK Education and Training Exports to the UK Economy: An Update: 2007*, 2007.

years, significant shifts have been taking place in higher education policies, both at the governmental and institutional levels.

UCL was one of the first UK universities to have a published International Strategy (formally approved by the UCL Council in December 2004 after 12 months of internal consultation). UCL has been an international institution since its foundation in 1828, but within the context of overall UCL long-term strategic planning, a clear strategy was formulated to enhance the university's world position and to articulate its international identity in response to the changing market context. Key factors influencing our thinking were:

- the rapid and widely recognised globalisation of Higher Education;
- the impact of transnational education (TNE) provision;
- the activities of international competitors;
- opportunities to internationalise and to build a global brand;
- opportunities for influence in strategically important regions.

External Challenges

Of course, UCL has to deliver its International Strategy within the dual context of UK Higher Education (HE) and global developments, and in shaping its activities it particularly acknowledges the following external challenges:

1. The Bologna Process and the opportunities and challenges which this presents with regard to length of programmes, credit transfer and issues of Quality Assurance. UCL is actively engaged in national and international debates on the Bologna Reform process, but national issues regarding credit equivalence and the length of programmes remains to be resolved at inter-governmental level. Given the substantial implications for all European universities of the Bologna Process, UCL has developed a discrete Bologna Strategy as a supplement to its International Strategy. While Bologna is often seen in the UK as a challenge or even a threat to our traditional practices of delivering degree programmes, its goal of creating a European Higher Education Area by 2010 in which student and staff mobility is the norm (or at least much more prevalent than at present) and in which degree programmes are more compatible, more comparable, more competitive and more attractive for students and scholars from both Europe and other continents is surely an eminently laudable as well as an ambitious one. Furthermore, there are ways in which the Bologna Process intersects creatively with developments in UK thinking on HE. One example is that of how we record student achievement. UCL has recently adopted the approach of an enhanced Diploma Supplement, drawing on guidance from the Bologna Process and also from the Burgess Report on 'Measuring and Recording Student Achievement' (2004)[1] and is now exploring how best to implement the recommendation in 'Beyond the Honours Degree classification: The Burgess Review Final Report' (2007)[2] of a Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) as the key vehicle for measuring and recording student achievement.

2. UK HE is highly diverse, being both stratified and hierarchical. While Ministers may state publicly that all UK universities provide the same standards of education, this is clearly not true, as is indicated both by student demand and by the many and various UK and international evaluation processes and league tables. This diversity has implications for the overall overseas branding of UK HE as a whole – and also for the ways in which an individual university positions itself in the market.

3. UCL has been since its foundation in 1826 resolutely committed to inclusiveness or to widening participation as it is now often known. For us, this is a global aspiration, as well

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[1] See http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/measuringachievement.pdf, 2004.
[2] See http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/Burgess_final.pdf, 2007.

as a UK one. In the case of many developing economies, this an increasing challenge with regard to provision of scholarship funds to support the most able students from third world countries, since there is no tradition of wide philanthropic support in this area.

4. There is a need to maintain institutional autonomy. The UK Government is a key funder, but in the case of UCL (as with many of the other top research-intensive universities), it is by no means the only - or even the major - funder.   There are increasing numbers of powerful stakeholders in the UK HE funding mix (fee-paying students, business and industry partners, overseas governments and funding agencies, philanthropic benefactors).   While UK universities are currently being urged to make ever more relationships with industry and while these partnerships are often powerful and productive, here as with government and other funders, universities must guard their autonomy over their key functions.

5. UCL must also respond to the rapidly changing technology context where new technologies have influenced the way students access HE and may in future impact on the primacy of campus delivery. However, it is important to be aware of the 'digital deficit', whereby students in many countries cannot access the latest technologies on the equipment to which they have access – and many, of course, do not even have constant electricity.

The UCL International Strategy – what is distinctive?

UCL's International Strategy is an 'internationalisation' strategy, in that it aims to internationalise the whole university, bringing institutional strategies for teaching and research together with related polices and activities. Its overall vision is to use the research and teaching capability of the university to address major problems facing the modern world, and as such, it has a clear moral heart and is coherent with the UCL vision that universities should be a force for the public good.   The UCL International Strategy has received wide recognition in the sector for the strength of its overall philosophy and fact that it not led primarily by financial considerations. This vision is re-iterated in the UCL Research Strategy which takes forward the aim of addressing issues of global significance through partnerships that cross and transcend the boundaries between the disciplines.
The UCL International Strategy has the following guiding principles:
- Excellence and High Quality, in that all activities, collaborations and partnerships should reinforce and enhance UCL's reputation;
- Primacy of the Academic Strategy, in that international activity should be driven by the university's academic policy
- Co-operation, whereby all international activity will be undertaken within a co-ordinated institutional framework
- Integration, whereby activity with an international focus should be integrated with activity directed at a national market
- Diversification, recognising that the international market is volatile and that consequently the global spread of international activity should be diversified.

The standard interpretation of 'internationalisation at home' i.e. an internationalised curriculum, international faculty members and student body, has been taken further by UCL under an initiative entitled 'Education for Global Citizenship and Leadership'.[1]   UCL aims to provide a student experience that equips graduates to be internationally employable, morally and ethically aware, willing and able to take on leadership roles, and possessing an understanding of other cultures and societies.

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[1] See http://www.ucl.ac.uk/global_citizenship/public/UCL.htm

An important factor is that the UCL Strategy is time-bound and also subject to mid-term review by a team including external members: the Strategy is valid for five years; beyond this point UCL expects its international aims to develop significantly and a new Strategy will be formulated. The Strategy also builds delivery against clearly defined aims and has an implementation plan with target dates and key responsibilities that belong with named persons or bodies; this plan is reviewed internally every year – such basic procedures avoid the document losing its immediacy.

Other key supporting elements are an Impact Assessment, which defined the divisions and departments with responsibility for overall delivery; a Risk Assessment underpinned by training to promote an understanding of the concepts of risk assessment and management; a budget with a recognition of the need to invest and some basic performance indicators that measure such things as the number of international collaborative partnerships.

The scheduled mid-term review has been undertaken, allowing an academic-led panel to consider how far the Strategy has delivered its aims and what has succeeded and what requires a change of approach. This process ensures the strategy continues to be under live debate in the institution.

The Challenges for UCL

Challenge 1: To establish a clear management structure to ensure leadership, delivery and integration of the International Strategy

Leadership
UCL recognised from the outset that to deliver its ambitious international agenda would require a lean and effective management structure, with visible leadership at the highest level as a signal of institutional commitment. The strategy is thus led by the Vice-Provost (Academic and International) (VPAI), who is a senior professorial academic, and the clear locus for decision-making and responsibility. UCL is also acutely aware that its targeted internationalisation takes place against a challenging context, wherein universities are global enterprises that operate in what has been defined as a world of 'supercomplexity'[1]

The VPAI is assisted by a team of six Pro-Provosts or regional advisors areas of the world identified as of strategic importance to UCL: Africa; China, Hong Kong & Macau; Europe; North America; South Asia & the Middle East; and South-East Asia. Each of these advisors is a senior Professorial and is seconded on a part-time basis from UCL's academic staff. They are the principal representatives of the university's interests to business, government, and higher education organisations in their respective regions. They ensure communication with faculties and departments and monitor and promote activities in their areas, they chair their own regional advisory groups and are expected to work with the relevant professional officers in the support Divisions.

Co-ordination of international affairs
The VPAI chairs the UCL International Steering Group (ISG), UCL's principle advisory body for all matters relating to the university's international activity. The ISG connects all those administratively supporting UCL's International Strategy: thus, membership is drawn from the International Office, the Alumni Office, the Development Office, the Business Partnerships Office, the Graduate School, the Language Centre, the Research Office, and the Scholarships Office.

Promotion, recruitment and research – a comprehensive International Office
Key here is the International Office (IO), which is responsible for all matters concerned with

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[1] See Ronald Barnett, *Realizing the University in an Age of Supercomplexity* (Buckingham, SRHE & OU, 1999), passim.

international student recruitment and knowledge regarding international universities' academic standing. The IO is UCL's centre of expertise and advice for students from overseas, providing information on matters such as immigration, sources of funding, housing, English language requirements, tuition fees and cost of living. IO staff make regular trips overseas to meet and offer advice to prospective students at education fairs, often in conjunction with other leading UK universities and government delegations. The IO is also a centre of expertise and advice supporting UCL academic staff who work internationally, crucially maintaining essential, up-to-date comparative data on all universities world-wide.

UCL is a highly complex and de-centralised organisation, and the structure outlined above is the institutional response to the need to provide overall central direction in international matters. The mid-term review has highlighted a need to re-focus the work of the International Steering Committee onto more strategic and forward planning issues, rather than maintaining its largely reflective and monitoring role.

Challenge 2: To ensure good communication within and without the institution: dissemination, information sharing, raising the brand identity

The above challenge reflects the complexity of the university's structures. UCL has used the cascade method of communicating the aims of the International Strategy, but ensuring that all staff are fully aware of the institutional aims and policies in this area is a significant challenge, despite the advance of technologies.

The internal communication challenge
UCL addresses the internal communication challenge by:
- Reinforcing the internal and external message through the work of the Corporate Communications Team, and particularly through use of the UCL web site (and advanced communications in genera) l in promoting the international message
- Providing clear systems for the academic Pro-Provosts to exchange information and integrate their work with the support divisions
- Bringing forward more champions of the international agenda at faculty and departmental level, and engaging them in ambassadorial work for the university.

The external communication challenge
The main UCL brand is not as well recognised overseas as some of its immediate competitors (Oxford, Cambridge, LSE). To compete at the global level, UCL needs to build brand and presence in global markets, so a Marketing Strategy has been developed which addresses this need- and UCL is working through targeted and funded collaborations with overseas governments to establish a presence in carefully chosen countries.
    Alumni are also a powerful resource in overseas countries, and an Alumni Strategy targets their support in the key areas of employment advice and mentoring; student recruitment; and visiting senior academics who can build our profile in overseas areas.

Challenge 3: To ensure engagement and embedding
The International Strategy acknowledges the 'challenge of changing internal cultures'. UCL has a de-centralised structure, and the most successful international work is therefore grounded in the research and teaching of academic units. In UK universities, there is often anxiety about top-down direction and managerialism, yet clear and strong leadership is essential in the modern and highly competitive HE world. At UCL, it is clear that the full range of aspirations encompassed in the International Strategy is becoming more embedded within UCL's operational philosophy: this is evident, for example, from the revised Research Strategy and the creation of the UCL-wide Institute for Global Health. Nonetheless, full embedding is yet to be achieved.

At the development stage of the International Strategy, UCL undertook a wide consultation, taking presentations to Heads of Department, Faculties and support Divisions. From this process came support and engagement (as well as critique); it remains a challenge to renew and maintain that engagement. In order to achieve this, UCL now requires alignment of the learning teaching and research strategies of academic units with the International Strategy and other corporate strategies, providing clear guidance to assist in this process. Furthermore, academic units are offered training and support to re-assess their strategic plans, but it remains a challenge to ensure internationalisation is embedded in the face of many competing priorities (research, teaching and learning, working with industry). Recognising that training and investment are instruments of change, a staff development programme is in place and there is targeted support for internationalisation of the curriculum as well as broader provision of training support in international matters. Leadership development is fostered, beginning at the level of Dean and Head of Department. UCL has also recognised the need for incentives and introduced a grant scheme to support staff in internationalising the curriculum and a secondment scheme to the UCL Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning to enable staff to work on internationalisation projects. In addition, the recent review has recommended that targeted investment is put into fostering international research collaborations.

Challenge 4: To ensure full integration with other strategies

The overall corporate strategy (UCL White Paper) places international activity at the heart of the overall vision. However, ensuring full co-ordination of supporting strategies can sometimes be hampered by the timing of their production. UCL has achieved integration in key areas of research and learning and teaching, in that the Institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy is fully integrated with the International Strategy, as both these are managed through the same structures, and the recent UCL Research Strategy places the international dimension at the heart of research and fully acknowledges the International Strategy. The recently announced four Grand Challenges of the Research Strategy, namely Global Health, Sustainable Cities, Wellbeing and Intercultural Interactions, were all chosen in part because they are highly international by their very nature.

An area for further work is that of the creation of spin-out companies. UCL is highly successful in this field, but has yet to integrate this arm of activity fully into the overall international strategy, and we recognise the need for more pro-active work in this area.

Challenge 5: To maintain forward momentum and initiate change

Following the mid-term review of the International Strategy, changes will be made and published. The review took into account the changing context and the areas of achievement that could be built upon and also identified new opportunities. For example, in two areas, UCL is planning significant shifts.

Students
The International Strategy aims to change the nature of the student body by both raising the intake of international students (particularly postgraduate students) and increasing the number of students undertaking study abroad. UCL has achieved its year-on-year percentage targets, and will now move to hard targets in these areas.
Further work on collaborations will increase the number of study aboard placements.

Overseas Campuses
UCL has re-considered the strategic advantages of opening off-shore campuses and has decided to establish small research-led campuses in targeted overseas countries with direct support of their governments. The first one, the UCL School of Energy and Resources, Australia, set up in partnership with the State of South Australia, will open in 2009. This is a major shift in thinking, one that is dictated by a perception that research and teaching are not

constrained by history or geography and by a recognition that the world of TNE is changing at great speed with ever more (and ever more prestigious) universities establishing campuses 'offshore'.

Challenge 6: Resources and the infrastructure

As is true in many research-led HEIs, UCL must take forward an ambitious agenda against a background of constrained resources. Investment in recruiting the best international research staff is essential, but UCL is competing in a world market for the best in their fields. Furthermore, with UK and EU students paying significant fees and with other students paying even higher fees, UCL must meet the challenge of their expectations in terms of teaching, learning and research infrastructure. While we invest continuously in staff, buildings and equipment to meet the challenge of global competitiveness, the UK HE sector suffers from under-funding (and does not enjoy the endowment position of many USA universities). For this reason, student feedback is monitored continuously via internal and external mechanisms to ensure that UCL has an accurate assessment of areas of need and highest expectation, so that the optimal decisions can be made about where investment should be targeted.

Conclusion
So what progress has UCL made against these various internal and external challenges? While the methodologies of league tables are open to challenge, their influence is undeniable on student recruitment and on international perception - and they provide a powerful reinforcement of UCL's performance as a global university.   In the Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Ranking of World Universities, UCL is currently ranked at 22 (and 3 in Europe); in the THE-QS World University Rankings, it is placed even higher at 9 in the world.   This is a gratifying outward manifestation of the success of the international strategy. The internationalisation of UCL is a work in progress, with much that has been achieved, notably in terms of sensitising the UCL community to the need for curriculum innovation and of building a culture where colleagues feel that they can and will contribute to the success of our international strategy.

However, much remains to be done.   Further success will depend on renewal and extension of the international strategy, on the development of targeted and well-resourced international collaborations that permit the mobility of staff and students, and on both pure and applied research that crosses national and cultural boundaries. We know that in-depth engagement is measurable only over time and that such change will always be incremental. But we have discovered that the best way to effect progress is through repeated consultation and clear communication of both objectives and outcomes. There are considerable time and energy implications for the leaders of our International Strategy and as we undertake more and more major international projects, we have to address the issue of management capacity. Furthermore, as more and more of our staff and students go to more and more countries, we need to ensure that we provide appropriate cultural briefing and linguistic preparation for them, just as we need to ensure that we provide appropriate induction for students and staff coming to London.

As internationalisation activities increase and the various targets in the International Strategy are progressively being met, UCL's global profile and position become ever stronger. This is gratifying, but both external and internal challenges remain as the world of higher education continues to evolve dynamically. Perhaps the greatest success of our implementation is the changes brought to UCL's ethos and culture, whereby staff and students now understand and proudly share in our definition of UCL as 'London's global university'.

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