

King's College London

November 2009

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited King's College London (the College) from 23 to 27 November 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the College offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

As a result of its investigations the audit team's view of the College is that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its provision
- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The College does not have an agreed definition of enhancement, but is committed to improving the learning opportunities of its students through a range of formal and informal processes based on a shared ethos. It would benefit, however, from monitoring the impact of these processes.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The College's arrangements for its postgraduate research students meet the expectations of the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA, and provide evidence of full and proper attention being paid to the quality of learning opportunities and the academic standards of its awards.

Published information

Reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College publishes about its educational provision and the academic standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the quality, range and accessibility of online support for personal tutors (paragraph 68)
- the embedding of the identification of good practice in institutional processes (paragraph 76)
- the contribution of the Graduate School to the development of college-wide policies and practices for postgraduate research students (paragraph 90)
- the completeness and accessibility of documentation in the new Committee Zone on the College website (paragraph 99).

Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that the College consider further action in some areas.

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- to ensure that programme approval, monitoring and review procedures are consistent, rigorous and independent, and include a full consideration of module content (paragraphs 16, 18, 25 and 84)

- to develop its procedures for engaging with external examiners and their reports, including preparing them for their role, sharing their reports with students and ensuring that all issues raised in each report are considered and addressed, and the response communicated to the external examiner in a timely manner (paragraphs 30 and 85)
- to ensure the consistent application of its assessment criteria, including achieving consistency in the exercise of the discretionary elements of the Regulations for Examinations (paragraphs 37 and 38)
- to ensure the systematic collection, analysis, dissemination and utilisation of student data and feedback (paragraph 52).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- to involve external subject experts in all programme reviews to assure itself of academic standards and the appropriateness of the curriculum (paragraph 21)
- to extend the opportunities for personal development planning to undergraduate and taught postgraduate students (paragraph 70).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The College is a founding member of the University of London. With a student roll of almost 23,000 students (two-thirds undergraduate) and five London campuses, it has undergone rapid growth since the 1980s. The same period has witnessed a significant shift in discipline focus, with medical, dental and health education emerging as major features of its portfolio (these areas now account for five of the nine schools around which the College is academically organised) and, while maintaining its traditional strengths in the arts and sciences, the College now provides one of the largest concentrations of health research in Europe.

2 The College is a member of the Russell Group of research-intensive institutions. It describes itself as a research-led teaching institution with a strong commitment to the service of society through the advancement of knowledge - a claim supported by a range of achievements, including the fact that it houses six Medical Research Council centres. In its Strategic Plan the College expresses an aspiration to become a global leader in higher education (it is currently 22nd in the Times Higher QS World University Rankings). Alongside the pursuit of research excellence it identifies maintaining and enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities as strategic priorities.

The information base for the audit

3 The College provided a briefing paper, which it helpfully updated immediately prior to the audit, and supporting documentation. The index to the Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the College's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of awards and the quality of its educational provision. The audit team had access to the report of the previous Institutional audit (June 2004) and the Review of research degree programmes (July 2006). The team received hard copies of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper, and other documentation requested in the course of the audit; the majority of materials were also made available electronically. The King's College Students' Union produced a written submission, setting out students' views on the accuracy of information, their experience as learners and their role in quality management. The team thanks the Union for its submission, to which it made frequent reference.

Developments since the last audit

4 Since its previous Institutional audit the College, while remaining part of the University of London, has obtained and commenced exercising taught and research degree awarding powers. It has also:

- adopted a new Strategic Plan
- revised its corporate and academic governance arrangements
- introduced an institution-wide Graduate School (see paragraph 89)
- completed the introduction of its credit framework for the majority of programmes
- rebranded the King's Institute of Learning and Teaching the King's Learning Institute
- increased student numbers (particularly in the international and postgraduate spheres)
- participated in QAA's Review of postgraduate research degree programmes
- made changes to its executive and senior management structure
- rationalised its professional service and support structure
- invested heavily in estate and information technology.

5 The previous Institutional audit invited the College to consider the desirability of:

- addressing variations in the annual monitoring of programmes by building on existing good practice
- developing a systematic institutional approach to incorporating the views of `graduates and employers into the enhancement of programme quality
- making more effective use of progression data to inform student policies aimed at improving completion rates
- reviewing the corporate framework for the management of collaborative activity to ensure consistency of practice.

In its briefing paper the College stated that it had addressed the first recommendation by introducing templates for all annual reports (see paragraph 17); the second mainly through the King's Graduate Project, which involves both employer and community engagement; the third by the exception reporting of unusual patterns of student performance; and the fourth by introducing procedures for the approval and monitoring of collaborative provision (see paragraphs 82 to 87).

Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

6 Council, the College's governing body, delegates responsibility for the regulation of teaching, examining and research to Academic Board as the senior academic body. Academic Board is supported by three subcommittees (the College Assessment Board, College Education Committee and College Research Committee), each of which oversees a suite of mainly operational bodies. Both the College Education Committee and College Assessment Board make use of scrutiny panels to undertake detailed assessments of quality assurance arrangements, freeing the parent bodies to focus more on strategic issues.

7 The College operates a devolved system of governance and management, its nine schools of study (almost all of which are subdivided into departments, divisions and/or centres) having considerable operational and interpretive autonomy within a regulatory and quality assurance framework set and monitored by Academic Board. In particular, with one exception (the single-discipline School of Law having implemented more economical arrangements) each school replicates the College committee structure. One example of central requirements is the appointment (by the College Education Committee) of external peers, normally for a four-year term and two per school. The main function of such peers, who sit as full members of approval and review panels, is to provide an external viewpoint on the process. External peers have experience of managing teaching and learning, external examining and research-led teaching, and familiarity with national quality assurance issues. They attend relevant meetings, producing a report at the end of their tenure; the tone of these reports is predominantly positive.

8 College Assessment Board has delegated responsibility for overseeing assessment arrangements; school boards of examiners report to it through the assessment scrutiny panel (which consists of the chairs of all school boards); programme boards of examiners report to school boards (which consist of the chairs of all programme boards). Subject to school board ratification, programme boards determine results other than in the case of special circumstances, when this responsibility falls to school boards.

9 The academic committee structure is supported by a comprehensive suite of regulations, procedures and guidelines designed to enable the College to assure itself that academic standards are maintained. In particular, the Academic Regulations include general and specific requirements for admissions, registration, examiners and research degrees, explaining also the credit framework for taught programmes. The regulations concerning students cover residence; misconduct; academic progress; fitness to practice; student complaints; and emergency powers. Students also receive an explanatory document entitled Useful things to know: a student guide to the College regulations.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

10 For the sake of convenience, all aspects of programme approval, monitoring and review are described in this section.

11 Responsibility for programme approval is devolved to schools. Following in-principle approval, the proposing department makes a formal submission to its school's education committee. Several helpful guidance notes specify the documentation this Committee is required to consider. This includes the programme specification, evidence of external input into programme design, evidence that the programme meets all relevant expectations of the Academic Infrastructure, and a business and marketing plan. The Committee institutes a programme approval panel, normally involving senior members of the school concerned, at least one member of another school's education committee, and an external peer (see paragraph 7) to examine the proposal.

12 The audit team, while confirming that the approval documentation scrutinised demonstrates that the correct procedures have been followed, identified areas where the procedures themselves could be strengthened:

- programme specifications, although produced to a template and meeting the expectations of the *Code of practice*, do not consistently address learning outcomes in joint programmes, referring only to those contained in the single honours programme specification - these clearly cannot be met in a joint programme

- the team could discern no clear rationale for the variability in the composition of approval panels, which range from the full membership of the School Education Committee and two external peers to only one internal member and two external peers. This level of variability left the team uncertain that the process is conducted consistently and with comparable independence from the proposers
- the team noted the apparent absence of any student contribution to the process.

Overall, on the basis of its examination of programme approval forms, and accepting that additional documentation can be called for (but noting also that this is not invariably done), the team found the approval process cannot give full consideration to quality and standards in those cases where detailed module specifications are not provided (see paragraph 15).

13 Where approval is conditional it is the responsibility of the education committee of the school concerned to follow up the response; the process is concluded when the documentation is signed off at college level. The audit team found no evidence that conditions are necessarily met and recommendations addressed prior to programme commencement; this is an omission the College will wish to rectify.

14 The College provides clear guidelines for the approval of programmes delivered partially or wholly off-campus by external bodies; such programmes include but are not restricted to the collaborative arrangements discussed later (see paragraphs 82 to 87). The guidelines augment the mainstream procedures with information which includes a report on off-campus learning resources, the mechanisms for monitoring them, and a draft memorandum of agreement. Responsibility for approving validations, franchises and joint degrees is not devolved, remaining a College Education Committee responsibility.

15 The approval procedure for new modules largely parallels programme approval. Module specifications seen by the audit team contained aims and learning outcomes but no indicative content or syllabus (the College stated that the changing content of research-led teaching makes it preferable to provide this information in student handbooks and the team confirms that this is done). The team noted that stated learning outcomes vary considerably in both detail and in their alignment with level descriptors. The College may find it helpful to reflect on whether the levels of variability evident to the team fall within the bounds of acceptability.

16 Overall, the audit team found the approval documentation and procedures adequate; they would, however, be strengthened were:

- the consideration of detailed module specifications or curriculum content required in programme approval
- the composition of the programme approval group made more consistent
- the College to ensure that programme approval conditions are always fulfilled and recommendations addressed
- consideration given to the acceptable degree of variability in aims and learning outcomes in module approval (see paragraphs 18, 25 and 84).

17 Annual monitoring was the subject of a recommendation in the previous Institutional audit. The College responded by introducing templates for annual reports (see paragraph 5). These cover, as appropriate:

- strengths and weaknesses
- major changes
- issues raised by students (including, for undergraduate programmes, the National Student Survey) and the responses

- issues raised by staff and the responses
- issues raised by external examiners and the responses
- unusual patterns in student data identified by examination boards
- links to professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) and employers
- student support
- the study abroad scheme
- examples of good practice
- planned actions for the year ahead.

18 The audit team found considerable variability in the detail and level of evaluation of both annual programme reports (an issue also identified by the scrutiny panel, in response to which an exemplary report is under preparation) and annual module reviews. While some of the latter are undertaken in depth, others review only assessment outcomes. This lack of consistency, reflected also in the fact that no requirement exists for relevant data to be provided or analysed, was noted also in a scrutiny panel meeting shortly before the audit. This variability inevitably limits the College's capacity to judge the appropriateness, comparability and effectiveness of the full range of its programmes, including those delivered in collaborative provision (see paragraphs 16, 25 and 84).

19 Programme review, though not formally devolved to schools, is structured and delivered by school education committees; reported to the College Education Committee; involves re-approval; operates on a six-yearly cycle, and covers all taught course provision. Its aims involve ensuring that each programme:

- meets its stated aims and objectives
- is reviewed against appropriate external reference points
- is current and valid
- maintains academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities
- identifies enhancement potential
- ensures students are achieving the intended learning outcomes
- ensures teaching, assessment and learning support allow for equal opportunity
- ensures the competence and appropriateness of the performance of any external partners
- is adequately resourced
- is commercially viable.

20 As with annual monitoring, programme review panels are established, although in this instance they are expected to include a student member 'where practicable'. Although the College in its briefing paper described students as active and valuable members of panels where they are included, the audit team noted that only around half the review reports scrutinised reported student membership; in one school it appears not to be done at all and, in another case, external examiners' reports were not made available to the student panel member. The College may find it helpful to reflect on both this range of practices in the light of different operational definitions of practicability, and on its expectations as to the deployment of students on review panels.

21 It is also the case that because external peers (see paragraph 7) are not appointed as subject specialists, while always able to comment on the procedures they may or may not be able to offer subject expertise. This random variability makes it possible for reviews to lack expert subject-level external scrutiny. It would be desirable for the College to involve external subject experts in all programme reviews to assure itself of academic standards and the appropriateness of the curriculum.

22 Programme review panels proceed with substantial documentation, including a bespoke self-evaluation document with specified headings and a range of centrally provided data sets which include:

- applications profile
- entry profile
- progression and completion rates
- student attainment
- first destination returns
- ethnicity data.

The programme review report includes comments on the data and how they are used at programme level. While the self-evaluation documents scrutinised were reflective in approach and met the College's procedural expectations, as with programme approval and annual monitoring the team noted the absence of any requirement to undertake detailed module review. In addition, as indicated below (see paragraph 45) scope exists for further consideration to be given to improving the utility of these data.

23 The programme review report is produced on a detailed template which requires assessments of academic standards and the learning environment for students, and a comprehensive commentary on the effectiveness of the quality framework. The report concludes by identifying aspects of good practice and making graded recommendations for further action. All review reports scrutinised followed this format. An action plan with timelines follows, and the audit team saw evidence of the one-year follow-up by school education committees (which address the action plan) and the College Education Committee (which receives, or chases, school responses, and whose Chair approves and signs-off the documentation).

24 The College has clear procedures for programme and module changes outside the review process, and the audit team confirms their successful operation. The team learned that there is scope, under defined circumstances, for programme review to be combined with PSRB validation or accreditation; the relevant documentation appears satisfactory.

25 Overall, the audit team concluded that it would be advisable for the College to ensure that programme approval, monitoring and review procedures are consistent, rigorous and independent, and include a full consideration of module content (see paragraphs 16, 18 and 84). Nevertheless, the team confirms that programme approval, monitoring and review are generally thorough in design and execution, and contribute to the assurance and management of academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities.

External examiners

26 Partly as a result of the historical requirements of the University of London, the College appoints a large number of external examiners; such examiners are normally appointed for four or five years with no extension. Their duties include overseeing the maintenance of academic standards and their comparability to national standards; overseeing the effective operation of the full range of assessment tasks (including approving draft examination papers); advising on suspected cases of plagiarism; giving consideration to relevant sections of the *Code of practice*; and submitting an annual report on a standard template.

27 On appointment, new external examiners should receive complementary information and advice from the Examinations Office and the chair of their programme board. The audit team noted from its scrutiny, however, that some external examiners are confused about aspects of their role, the information they should receive, and assessment policies and regulations; some responses from departments and schools express similar confusion as to where responsibility lies for supplying particular information.

28 The audit team learned that external examiners' reports are scrutinised by chairs of boards of examiners and heads of school; procedures for communicating their contents to teaching staff are less clearly managed. Programme boards of examiners (see paragraph 8) are responsible for addressing matters raised in external examiners' reports and for reporting on action taken to their school-level counterpart; school boards of examiners in turn report annually (via the assessment scrutiny panel) to the College Assessment Board. The team found that while some school boards provide a full commentary on external examiners' reports and action taken, others make no comment at all.

29 Programme annual reports comment on how the main issues raised by external examiners have been addressed. The audit team found that most of the reports are brief, with only a minority providing a full commentary. The team was, however, informed that this section will in future be strengthened. The Chair of College Assessment Board and the Deputy Registrar also produce a critical summary of each external examiner's report, on the basis of which a response is requested from schools. Issues identified include the structure of examination papers; question levels; plagiarism action; degree classification procedures; and conduct of examinations.

30 While satisfied overall that external examiners contribute significantly to assuring the academic standards of College awards, the audit team identified a number of gaps in the College's communications with them:

- there is no college-level induction nor any requirement for schools to offer it, in spite of the fact that some external examiners have requested it; some schools do make such provision on a voluntary basis, however, and the College has identified such initiatives as good practice
- some reports have expressed concern about the non-receipt of draft examination papers (or late receipt following submission to the printers), in particular, when one department, contrary to regulations, decided against sending draft examination papers to the external examiner, the situation was identified only retrospectively through the external examiner's report, and was not, therefore, rectified until the following year
- no college-level procedure exists for responding to external examiners on their reports, although the chair of the programme or examination board often communicates with them orally or in writing; several such examiners reported themselves unaware of any action taken in response to their previous comments or criticisms (which in some cases they repeated the following year)
- in its briefing paper the College acknowledged the unsatisfactory return rate for external examiners' reports; nevertheless, in spite of a regulation specifying termination of contract as the normal response to non-submission, some external examiners had failed to submit successive reports without remedial action
- no central procedure exists to address the recommendation of the Review of the Quality Assurance Framework that external examiners' reports should be shared with students, and the team found this is not invariably done.

Given this cluster of concerns, it would be advisable for the College to develop its procedures for engaging with external examiners and their reports, including preparing them for their role, sharing their reports with students and ensuring that all issues raised in each report are considered and addressed, and the response communicated to the external examiner in a timely manner.

31 Overall, and notwithstanding unresolved communication problems, external examiners, who overwhelmingly judge the standards attained appropriate to the level of the award, contribute to the assurance of academic standards.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

32 For the sake of convenience, all aspects of institutional engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points are described in this section.

33 The audit team confirms that the Academic Infrastructure, aided by an efficient mapping procedure, is embedded in institutional processes and appropriate references to the Infrastructure appear in approval, monitoring and review documentation, and, other than in the case of joint programmes (see paragraph 12) where remedial action would be beneficial, programme specifications reflect its expectations and requirements. The College acknowledged in its briefing paper that a more systematic overview of the outcomes of PSRB visits would be helpful, stressing, however, that procedures for considering the ensuing reports now involve institutional-level review, with school responses routinely included in the annual report. The College will doubtless wish to continue to assure itself as to the efficacy of this new arrangement.

34 The audit found that the College engages generally constructively with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points.

Assessment policies and regulations

35 The College's examination framework is supported by detailed and comprehensive policies and guidelines, including complaints and appeals procedures, and the audit team considers these fit for purpose.

36 The College stated in its Learning and Teaching Strategy that it has 'fair and equitable assessment procedures' and has, aided by the new credit framework, worked to harmonise practice. The audit team confirms that it saw a careful and cautiously confident analysis of the initial impact of this framework. The College has also very recently revised its institution-wide marking framework to reduce the burden of universal double marking by allowing a range of options within defined parameters.

37 The audit team, in scrutinising further the claim that assessment is fair and equitable, noted that the Regulations for Examinations permit the exercise of limited discretion in areas which include permission to resit, aspects of degree classifications and the condonement of failed modules. The lack of guidance on the exercise of this discretion, however, potentially permits the differential treatment of identically placed students; such a situation, while not necessarily unfair, would be unlikely to be equitable.

38 In addition, each year school boards of examiners submit proposed assessment schemes for all taught programmes, a procedure which enables schools to map subject-specific criteria on to the College framework. While the College has criteria for all three undergraduate levels, some schools operate on the basis of only the highest level, determining attainment by reference to learning outcomes. The audit team, which takes the view that this variability raises the possibility of inequitable assessment, also learned that one school's postgraduate taught assessment board had replaced the College criteria with its own on the ground that it considered the former unsatisfactorily generic. Although approved by the College Assessment Board, this appears to be a breach of regulations which permit augmentation but not substitution. The team further noted from the student written submission that a number of undergraduates had expressed concerns about the use of the criteria. Bearing in mind both this issue and that raised in the previous paragraph, it would be advisable for the College to ensure the consistent application of its assessment criteria, including achieving consistency in the exercise of the discretionary elements of the Regulations for Examinations.

39 The student written submission suggests that while the majority of students are satisfied with the quality of feedback and the time taken to receive it, a significant minority are dissatisfied, mainly with timeliness or content, but in some cases with the fact that their work was never returned. This mixed response was broadly corroborated by students who met the audit team; the team noted that one school has devised its own feedback policy. College guidelines on the topic have recently been approved and a working group has been established to guide the provision of feedback on written examinations, endorsing an increased emphasis being given to this central aspect of students' experience.

40 The audit team examined the guidelines for translating marks awarded by collaborating institutions, which state that such marks should either not be used in the classification calculation or that the translation method should be approved annually. The College acknowledges, and the team concurs, that a variety of practices and methodologies currently exists for transferring off-campus marks, and that the introduction of a standard conversion framework, currently under consideration, would be beneficial.

41 The audit team has identified inconsistencies in the College's assessment procedures and made recommendations which, if pursued throughout the institution, would contribute to their reduction; when set alongside the team's observations about the College's communication with external examiners (see paragraphs 30 and 85) it is clear that there is significant scope for current practices to be improved. Nevertheless, no evidence was found that such practices pose a threat to the threshold standards of College awards.

Management information - statistics

42 The College Education Committee analyses progression and completion data contained in annual reports on a by-school basis; the College Assessment Board analyses data supplied by the Special Examinations Arrangements Committee (which compares special needs student performance with that of the standard cohort). While these data are clearly of considerable value, and while there is evidence of debate having taken place in College Assessment Board about the kinds of data which would be beneficial, the audit team could find little evidence of their systematic disaggregation, dissemination and utilisation throughout the institution. While this may reflect the fact that, as the College stated in its briefing paper, it does not consider completion rates a significant problem, the team noted from annual reports that in spite of introducing remedial measures, schools with poorer progression rates continue to express concern about withdrawal rates.

43 A recently initiated comparison with other Russell Group institutions has revealed that the College awards a lower than average proportion of honours degrees in the First class, particularly in relation to its high entry requirements - a finding which may encourage it to support further comparative enquiries and to reflect further on the advice of many external examiners to mark to the full range.

44 The audit team was told that departmental staff consider student performance a key indicator in module review, would value having progression and completion data annually, not least for inter-school comparison, and draw mainly on local data to consider module performance, as they find the central system unfriendly. As access to the central system is by authorised personnel only, academic staff seeking student data must either seek individual authorisation or commission data retrieval from authorised colleagues, normally administrators. The audit team, having explored and discussed current procedures, found that the student support provided by departmental staff would benefit from the more ready and systematic provision of centrally derived, comparative progression and completion data.

45 While noting the range of centrally provided data sets available to programme review panels (see paragraph 22), the absence of usable data on a wide range of student variables is a significant omission which potentially prevents the College from assuring itself of the

comparability of the academic standards of its awards or of the quality of learning opportunities for all its students.

46 Notwithstanding the concerns raised in this section, the audit team concludes overall that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

47 For the sake of convenience, all aspects of programme approval, monitoring and review, and of institutional engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points, were described in Section 2.

Management information - feedback from students

48 The College provides a variety of opportunities for students to offer feedback on their experiences. Staff-student liaison committees operate at departmental or divisional level, and the audit team found evidence, confirmed by students, of mainly active and responsive committees (albeit with variable student attendance and variable efficiency), with minutes and other information often (but not always) available online.

49 The College does not undertake institution-wide student experience surveys, though it has future plans to conduct such surveys with first and second-year students, and had, at the time of the audit, undertaken but not analysed undergraduates' induction experience. Nor does it have a single system for gathering feedback on central support services, deploying methods ranging from online and paper forms to focus groups. In a practice which might bear emulation elsewhere in the College, the Careers Service voluntarily publishes its responses to consumer feedback online.

50 Module and programme questionnaires are a departmental or divisional responsibility, and, while most address similar aspects of the student experience, the absence of a standard template reduces the scope for inter-programme comparison. The audit team also found that not all students are aware of actions taken in response to feedback.

51 National Student Survey (NSS) results are considered at all institutional levels (the College did not participate in the first national survey of taught postgraduates). The College responded to the results of the 2008 NSS by instituting a Task Force to identify actions to improve the student experience. In response to the 2009 results, which the College again found disappointing, all schools were required to produce action plans: these had been submitted and were under consideration at the time of the audit. The College is also aware of the seriousness of some issues raised in the student written submission, a number of which, notably the qualitative comments annexed to the main report, resonate with the NSS findings. College Education Committee is currently taking these issues forward in partnership with the Students' Union.

52 Overall, while acknowledging that the College's methods of capturing and responding to student feedback contribute to the assurance and enhancement of students' learning opportunities, but noting also reservations expressed about the effectiveness of its current procedures for data gathering and utilisation (see paragraph 45), it would be advisable for the College to ensure the systematic collection, analysis, dissemination and utilisation of student data and feedback.

Role of students in quality assurance

53 The College states that it considers students important partners in quality assurance. Regular meetings take place between Students' Union officers and senior College managers, and the Union is represented on all major central committees. In addition, as noted earlier (see paragraph 20), programme review panels are expected to include student members where

practicable. This, however, is not universally achieved, and one school in particular has yet to implement the policy. At school level, where students are represented on a range of committees, training for representatives is provided jointly by the College and the Union. Nevertheless, the College acknowledges that representation is not uniform, and a joint College-Union working group is currently reviewing the issue.

54 Students also play an active role in working groups, projects and other fora, and are active in the King's Graduate Project, a major initiative designed to enhance learning opportunities by reviewing teaching, learning and assessment (see paragraph 77).

55 The audit team identified two areas where the College's communication and engagement with students echo comments in the student written submission, indicating that the notion of partnership has yet to be fully attained:

- the College knows from a range of sources that, while it has initiated a programme of refurbishment as part of a major 10-year programme to upgrade facilities and maximise space efficiency, some students have expressed strong dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching accommodation. It became clear to the team that many students are aware of this investment only to the extent that they personally find the upgrading disruptive, and have little understanding of its strategic purpose or of the steps being taken to minimise disturbance
- in the context of the phasing out and imminent closure of two sets of undergraduate degree programmes, an issue not raised in the briefing paper, the audit team was informed by students that little or no timely discussion had taken place with those affected.

While satisfied that the schools and departments concerned are working to ensure that students' experience is as little affected as possible, at institutional level the partnership with students in assuring the quality of vulnerable or closing programmes has been quite limited, leading to avoidable concern and anxiety. Difficult as this would be to achieve, the College might wish to reflect on whether a more strategic approach to its partnership with students in sensitive areas would turn some currently critical comments into more positive, engaged and understanding ones.

56 The audit team concludes that while the College's arrangements for student participation contribute to the management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities, their overall effectiveness is diminished by the variability with which they are implemented, particularly at departmental and divisional level, and in one case at school level; in addition, scope exists for the College to review the nature and effectiveness of its partnership with students, particularly in sensitive or difficult areas.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

57 As a research-led teaching institution the College has the ambitious aim of ensuring that 90 per cent of academic staff produce research of international quality; this appears to the audit team an ambitious short-term target. Its Learning and Teaching Strategy aspires to ensure that the research ethos enriches students' learning experience. The audit team confirms that a strong research dimension exists in most undergraduate as well as postgraduate curricula; external examiners repeatedly confirm the existence of a research-led environment and students value the influence of that environment on their learning.

58 Overall, the audit team confirms that the College's approach to supporting research-led teaching is both successful and has a positive impact on the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Other modes of study

59 The College offers a small number of programmes by distance or blended learning; these are monitored and reviewed in the same way as standard programmes, with additional necessary variables (including the suitability of the e-learning platform). The College acknowledges a lack of central coordination in this area, and has instituted an advisory forum to report to College Education Committee. It is likely, following a recent review, that future developments will focus more on blended than on pure distance-learning.

60 Over 400 students annually spend a year abroad obtaining credit towards their degrees, and many more, mainly in the health field, undertake professional placements. The audit team, having scrutinised documentation defining the nature and level of support for placement students, confirms that they meet the expectations of the *Code of practice* and that relevant students report that they consider such support satisfactory.

Resources for learning

61 The College has a large resource of both printed and electronic work; students also have access to the Senate House and Institute of Advanced Studies libraries as well as the many other resources available in London. Information services centres and libraries are located on all main campuses, and subject-specific collection management policies have been agreed by schools. The Information Services and Systems Directorate, supported by printed and online user guides, provides induction and training for students and staff. Although the College does not routinely collect feedback data from students at institutional level (see paragraph 45), NSS results indicate high levels of student satisfaction.

62 A network of over 1,600 public access workstations is available. Although the College reports extremely high levels of fault-free availability and speedy repair (95 per cent and 90 per cent respectively), students, in the written submission, staff-student liaison committees and discussion with the audit team, expressed considerable scepticism about this claim, drawing attention also to problems with printing. The College has recently responded to student criticism by approving the purchase of 250 further machines and improving printing facilities.

63 The current Connected Campus project is aimed at improving the information technology infrastructure, providing better access and improving support for research, teaching and administration. The College supports a commercial platform for its virtual learning environment; the fact that some schools invest part of their budget to develop separate platforms is not regarded as a problem by either students or staff.

64 Acknowledging that in a multi-campus institution students' experiences inevitably differ and that some students have been strongly critical of facilities such as teaching accommodation (see paragraph 55), but noting both the excellent provision available in the College and elsewhere in London and that the College is addressing identified deficiencies, the audit team concludes that most students are adequately served by the learning resources available.

Admissions policy

65 The College, a selecting institution with high entry standards, aims to balance excellence with cultural diversity. To this end its Fair Admissions Strategy specifies aims and objectives ranging from the broad and general to the detailed and specific; there is evidence that the College, in conjunction with local partners, is investing in raising aspirations and providing progression paths. The Access to Medicine programme, for example, has facilitated the admission of talented local students who might otherwise not meet the Medical School's stringent standard entry qualifications. In spite of these achievements, however, the audit team was unable to find evidence of institutional-level monitoring of the progress of such students following admission in comparison with that of standard entrants in such a way as would enable the College to judge, and therefore enhance, the effectiveness of its approaches and programmes.

66 The audit team concludes that the College's admissions strategy, while fit for purpose, would benefit from further systematic college-level monitoring.

Student support

67 At institutional level, student induction, which is supplemented by local-level initiatives, is the responsibility of the Directorate of Services for Students or, in the case of postgraduate research students, the Graduate School (see paragraph 89). Initial welcomes, induction and continuing support for the increasing volume of international students are provided by the Directorate of Services for Students, while other services address a range of issues relating to life in the United Kingdom. Support for students whose first language is not English is provided by the English Language Centre. The Centre plays an important role in the recruitment and support of widening participation and international students by providing study skills sessions and language support for non-native speakers. International students confirmed the effectiveness of the support provided.

68 All undergraduates are assigned a personal tutor and, normally separately, one or more academic tutors. Greater variability exists for taught postgraduates, who are either assigned a personal tutor or a named individual for programme-level consultation. Personal tutors are offered training and development courses; provided with guidance in the form of an online toolkit which the audit team considers comprehensive, practical and user-friendly; and can access up-to-date academic information about their tutees' progress through the College portal. The quality, range and accessibility of online support for personal tutors constitute a feature of good practice. Notwithstanding the quality of preparation, however, students who met the audit team supported views expressed in the student written submission and programme reviews as to the variability of personal tutoring; the College will wish to explore and, if appropriate, address, these observations.

69 The College has a comprehensive range of central services, including the Compass Enquiry Centre, which acts as a first port of call for a range of non-academic issues. Most services are available online, by telephone, email and face-to-face, to provide personal and academic support for all student categories: they are well-publicised and appear familiar to students. While most undergraduates are full-time, part-time students also reported general satisfaction with their experience, while accepting that not all College services are sufficiently flexible to accommodate their work patterns.

70 While personal development planning is available for postgraduate research students, no formal provision is made to extend it to students on taught programmes; the introduction of such a requirement at institutional level, currently under consideration, is included in the work of the King's Graduate Project. It would be desirable for the College to extend the opportunities for personal development planning to undergraduate and taught postgraduate students.

Staff support (including staff development)

71 Operational responsibility for the induction and management of probationary staff rests with the head of the department or division concerned, drawing on guidance from the Human Resources Directorate. All new appointees are assigned a mentor, and those without appropriate previous teaching experience or qualifications are required to take the Higher Education Academy accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice. Clear procedures exist for decision-making on confirmation of appointment.

72 The King's Learning Institute offers a range of professional development opportunities, including a suite of accredited teaching qualifications from certificate to PhD; it also, through a system in which a member of Institute staff is assigned to each school, provides tailored advice and courses. Thirdly, it encourages appropriate staff to undertake pedagogic research and to disseminate their findings at the annual Excellence in Learning and Teaching Conference.

73 The College's appraisal scheme offers academic staff an opportunity to identify their objectives and achievements in research, teaching, knowledge transfer and administration or management; heads of department maintain appraisal records. A peer support scheme has replaced the former observation scheme with the aim of permitting greater procedural flexibility and be less stressful; there is, however, still variation in uptake.

74 In the context of a balanced institutional promotion strategy, teaching excellence is a criterion for promotion to senior lecturer and professor. Nevertheless, the College showed in its briefing paper that whereas fewer than five per cent of staff promoted since 2008 did not include research as a main contributor to their applications, over one-third, predominantly in science disciplines, did not include teaching. Students may nominate staff for teaching excellence awards, which are presented at graduation ceremonies; one science department has recently introduced a similar competition for demonstrators; and a supervisory excellence award is available to research student supervisors (see paragraph 90).

75 Confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the College's present and likely future management of the learning opportunities available to its students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

76 The College, which does not have a unified definition of, or separate strategy for, enhancement, nonetheless uses the term regularly and identifies continuous improvement as a guiding principle of its quality framework. It aims to embed the concept in the remit of all college and school-level bodies by introducing procedures for the reporting of good practice, hence the templates used in quality management require reference to enhancement to be made. The audit team confirms the seriousness of the College's approach to identifying good practice and notes that this approach is valued and adhered to by staff, and confirms that the reporting processes associated with it are consistently followed. The embedding of the identification of good practice in institutional processes is itself a feature of good practice.

77 The College Learning and Teaching Strategy aims to:

- sustain and enhance academic excellence
- enhance the student learning experience
- ensure that this experience is enriched by the research-led teaching environment
- help students develop skills to increase employability.

This Strategy is supported by schools' learning and teaching strategies, the King's Learning Institute and the King's Graduate Project, which is undertaking a fundamental review of teaching, learning and assessment both in the College itself and, as a result of a successful funding bid to the Higher Education Funding Council for England, with the University of Warwick.

78 Each school appoints a learning and teaching coordinator on a one-day a week basis to support enhancement, serve as a conduit between the learning and teaching strategies of College and school, and oversee the peer support system and monitor student feedback. Learning and teaching coordinators meet monthly as the Learning and Teaching Coordinators' Forum, both with each other and with staff from the King's Learning Institute, to share good practice and inter-school issues, explore the potential for cross-school collaboration, and report to and advise the College Education Committee.

79 This Forum is one of a number of mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice within and across schools. College Education Committee receives a range of reports from schools and scrutiny panels, where good practice is reported. The audit team confirms that heads of school are generally assiduous in disseminating such practice; identified instances of staff

members having benefited from good practice within their own school or another; and noted the work of the King's Learning Institute in facilitating cross-school support and development.

80 The audit team also noted, however, the absence of any systematic college-wide procedure for the evaluation, analysis and collation of good practice beyond the mechanisms already described. Nevertheless, the team understands that the College is considering establishing a website to make this information universally available, and would encourage it in this endeavour.

81 The College does not have an agreed definition of enhancement, but is committed to improving the learning opportunities of its students through a range of formal and informal processes based on a shared ethos. It would benefit, however, from monitoring the impact of these processes.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

82 At institutional level the College aims to collaborate with a small number of high-quality partners; it has no plans for further validation arrangements or to franchise its provision. Its modest collaborative portfolio comprises joint and dual degrees, partnership programmes and one validation. Recognised categories of collaborative agreements are clearly defined; all collaborations, each of which is assigned a defined level of risk, are supported by a signed memorandum of understanding or, in the case of those operating only or mainly at programme-level, agreement. The Academic Support and Quality Office maintains a publicly available central register of collaborative arrangements.

83 The audit team confirms that the College devotes considerable attention to verifying the quality of potential partners and to the approval process; all memoranda, as well as comprehensive management, deliberative and administrative procedures for overseeing such provision, are in place, and a termly report on new and terminating partnerships is submitted to Academic Board.

84 Annual monitoring reports on validated programmes are received by Academic Board; those on the college-based elements of joint programmes and dual award schemes are appended to school annual reports. The audit team, having examined a range of reports on the College's three dual award schemes, found them to be, although complete, of variable quality. In particular:

- while school examination boards receive data on exported students' performance on both College and partner-based parts of the programmes concerned, these data do not invariably enable the College to monitor the equivalence of student experience at the partner institution
- the College does not routinely undertake comprehensive comparative analyses of the respective performances of dual award and college-based candidates on programmes in the same subject.

It would be advisable for the College to ensure that programme monitoring procedures are consistent, rigorous and independent, and include a full consideration of module content (see paragraphs 16, 18 and 22).

85 External examiners are appointed by, and report to, the College, and operate on the same basis as their on-campus counterparts; where collaborative programmes are cognate with on-campus provision the same external examiner is normally used. Although no specific issues were identified in connection with the external examining of collaborative programmes, the concerns, including the submission rate of reports, identified by the audit team in relation to on-campus provision (see paragraph 30) impact similarly on the quality and standards of such provision.

It would again be advisable for the College to develop its procedures for engaging with external examiners and their reports, including preparing them for their role, sharing their reports with students and ensuring that all issues raised in each report are considered and addressed, and the response communicated to the external examiner in a timely manner.

86 For each collaborative arrangement the school concerned provides exported students with a handbook containing information appropriate to the nature of programme delivery and administration, including, where appropriate, grade conversion procedures; for students travelling overseas the school provides information and guidance on the experience of living within the country concerned. The audit team reviewed a number of these handbooks, which it considered fit-for-purpose and helpful.

87 The audit team confirms that the College's processes for assuring the academic standards and quality of collaborative provision have been informed by the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. Partner and programme approval processes are rigorous, though school-level review, particularly annual monitoring, where variability exists in the quantity of data provided and the quality of analysis undertaken, would benefit from further development.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

88 The audit team confirms the flourishing nature of the College's research environment, as signified in particular by its considerable success in terms of external research funding and its generally strong record in successive research assessment exercises. The College has almost 2,000 postgraduate research students, over nine per cent of the student population, of which over one-fifth are international and over one-third part-time. Extensive learning resources are available in most areas of study, the value of which was largely confirmed in the 2008 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. The College has recently established separate postgraduate workspaces in all its libraries and opened graduate lounges as social spaces on four campuses.

89 The Graduate School, initiated in 2006, has a staff of 12, including a full-time Director, and a five-person Researcher Development Unit, through which it discharges its broad responsibility for the development of all early career researchers (as well as postgraduate research students) in the College. The Graduate School's remit is for research students and some aspects of taught postgraduate provision (these do not include the induction of taught postgraduates which remains a school responsibility). The Graduate School also houses the London hub of Vitae (a national organisation championing the development of doctoral researchers and research staff in higher education institutions and research institutes), which provides additional training opportunities and hosts two Royal Literary Fund Writing Fellows, who advise students on writing skills.

90 The Graduate School's main spheres of activity currently involve supporting the recruitment, induction, enhancement, skills training and progress monitoring of research students, and liaising with schools of study. For these purposes and others its website seems an especially effective communication vehicle, containing as it does a wide range of information and advice, including, where appropriate, instances of good practice from the personal statements of nominees for supervisory excellence awards (see paragraph 74). The Graduate School Forum, chaired by the Director and including all school heads of graduate studies and a student representative, contributes to policy and practice development and reports to College Education Committee on a range of issues. The audit team found that the Graduate School has established itself as an important developer and driver of institutional strategy for research students, and that institution-wide appreciation of its work exists. The contribution of the Graduate School to the development of college-wide policies and practices for postgraduate research students is a feature of good practice.

91 The College's Core code of practice for postgraduate research degrees, supplied to all research students on registration and reproduced on the Graduate School website, is underpinned by the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA. Schools report annually to College Education Committee on its implementation: these reports are full and responsive to the requirements of the Core Code, and, while like other documents surveyed in the course of this audit, they are of variable quality. The Graduate School is responding to this and other forms of variability (including, in spite of overall very encouraging figures, cross-college withdrawal, submission, and completion rates) as part of a more general enhancement programme.

92 Admission is a school responsibility, with administration falling to the relevant campus's central administrative unit; with online procedures already in place the activity appears to be operationally efficient. Both the Core Code and the Regulations for Admission and Registration specify clear requirements, compliance with which is monitored by schools and reported to College Education Committee (though the audit team found that these procedures are not always closely adhered to). The Graduate School offers bespoke induction courses for full and part-time and international students; all students are also expected to attend school-based induction. Research students appear generally well-informed about the necessary procedures.

93 All approved supervisors, two of whom are assigned to each research student, have been trained for their role. Supervisors are required to keep a record of formal supervisory meetings; a student-supervisor agreement exists; and the Graduate School website, the Core Code and the Handbook for Supervisors contain advice on managing the supervisory relationship. A formal review panel of three assessors, including at least one member of staff other than the supervisors, is instituted for each research student. The panel reports to the appropriate school committee at least six-monthly, and is responsible for recommending upgrading to PhD, a decision taken within a specified time-span. Student monitoring, which already appears satisfactory, should be enhanced by the implementation of a college-wide online recording system in 2010.

94 The Core Code requires students to undertake some 10 days' generic training and development annually, though it is clear that this requirement is in practice heavily negotiable and not always closely monitored. Nevertheless, the training offered by the Graduate School's Researcher Development Programme, which is aligned with external expectations and requirements and designed to identify learning needs, aid registration on courses, permit participation in personal development planning and produce a transcript, was valued by the students who met the audit team. While the team was unable, from information made available to it, to identify current uptake with confidence, relevant data are to be incorporated in the new key performance indicators. Schools also deliver discipline-specific training and the Graduate School is considering coordinating this to identify gaps and avoid duplication.

95 Although the Core Code permits research students to teach up to six hours weekly, the students the audit team met were unaware of this limitation; such students are also required to be appropriately trained. While the College reports that some 200 students attended the introductory training course in 2008, the 2008 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey suggests that take-up is not universal. This finding is confirmed in school reports to College Education Committee, which also make clear that teaching hours are not reliably monitored. The College acknowledges these omissions, and informed the team that it is putting in place procedures to ensure that monitoring of training and teaching hours is increasingly effective at both College and school levels.

96 The Core Code also requires schools to collect feedback from research students, reporting the outcome in their annual report. Though the audit team learned that not every school was aware of the results of the 2008 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, the Graduate School undertook a detailed analysis of them, publishing details of the main findings and the actions consequently taken on its website.

97 The appointment of examiners and the conduct of examinations are the responsibility of the Research Degrees Examination Board, which reports to College Assessment Board. There is a high degree of externality in the examining system since candidates normally have two external examiners, only one of whom may be from the University of London. Nominations are approved after a scrutiny by a subject area board from the candidate's discipline, which is charged with reviewing nominations against defined guidelines. External examiners' reports are scrutinised at several levels, and an analysis of reports, including possible reasons for referrals, is submitted to the Graduate School Forum and the Research Degrees Examination Board. The analysis, which was seen by the audit team, identified no strong pattern of referrals other than language and presentational problems among some international students; the College has responded by introducing additional training.

98 The College's arrangements for its postgraduate research students meet the expectations of the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and provide evidence of full and proper attention being paid to the quality of learning opportunities and the academic standards of its awards.

Section 7: Published information

99 The College publishes a wide range of information in hard copy and electronic format. As part of its Connected Campus project (see paragraph 63) it is currently moving its web-based information for staff and students into a new portal, One Space, to increase both coherence and user-friendliness. It has redesigned its Policy Zone, identified as a feature of good practice in the previous Institutional audit, introducing a new Committee Zone to archive central and school committee agendas, minutes and all associated papers. The completeness and accessibility of documentation in the new Committee Zone on the College website constitute a feature of good practice.

100 The Academic Support and Quality Office is responsible for checking all prospectuses to ensure that only approved programmes are advertised and their contents accurate. All externally available web pages and printed materials are governed by an institutional policy on layout and design, and are subject to approval by the Director of Marketing. Collaborative partners are required to submit material for publication for College approval.

101 It is confirmed that the externally available information required by the Higher Education Funding Council for England guidelines is published on the College website and that the teaching quality information on the Unistats website appears accurate and complete.

102 Programme specifications are available online; the College acknowledges that students have yet to make optimal use of them. Module approval forms, which provide the definitive specification of modules offered, do not currently contain syllabus details, are held centrally, and are not available to staff and students. Given that the necessity of students relying on details contained in school and department documentation increases the risk of inaccuracy, the College is minded, subject to resource availability, to introduce an electronic system for the production and approval of programme and module documentation. Such a system, which would allow the direct input of information to the student record system, thereby creating a single data source for programme and module information, would seem likely to solve this potential problem.

103 Students who met the audit team reported that they find all admission and induction information full and accurate, and school and departmental handbooks predominantly so. Checking the accuracy of information in these handbooks is the responsibility of schools. The College acknowledges the existence of variability in form and content (an issue confirmed by evidence in the student written submission); it has responded by introducing a core set of information for use in all handbooks from next academic year.

104 Reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College publishes about its educational provision and the academic standards of its awards.

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