Royal Veterinary College

February 2009

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) undertook an Institutional audit of the Royal Veterinary College, University of London (the College) as part of a year-long scrutiny of the College's application for taught and research degree awarding powers, which commenced in 2008. The final round of meetings with College representatives took place on 19 February 2009. 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.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the College and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the College manages the academic aspects of its provision.

In Institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK. The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment of students.

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 institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The College's approach to quality enhancement is intended to be 'embedded' rather than being the subject of a formal policy or a set of defined procedures. The College has some way to go in making all staff aware of the College's approach to enhancement and their explicit responsibilities in this area. The dissemination of good and innovative practice in teaching and learning occurs primarily through informal contacts. The College makes extensive use of opportunities for enhancement and exploits the information and resources available to it. The audit team concluded that instances of enhancement activity are occurring, albeit in the absence of a clear policy. The College's approach to enhancement is reactive rather than proactive. To assist the exploitation of enhancement opportunities, procedures for the collection, dissemination, integration and exploitation of feedback data and management information should be placed on a more consistent footing. When this has been achieved, it is likely that more effective and efficient use will be made of key information sources and College-wide enhancement activities will be better informed.

Postgraduate research students

The College has a strong research ethos and the quality of its research is recognised both nationally and internationally. The College participated in the HEFCE/QAA Review of research degree programmes, in 2006. The judgement of that review was that '…the institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programme provision is appropriate and satisfactory…'. The aspects of assessment and the security of award standards considered by the audit team led it to the same conclusion as the Review, namely that '…institutional arrangements for the assessment of research students are appropriate and satisfactory…'. In particular, the team concluded that the research degree student monitoring

and appraisal process is soundly constructed, securely organised and responsive to the needs of individual students and commends the management and monitoring of the supervision, and the training and support provided for, postgraduate research students. The team found that the University's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision for postgraduate research programmes 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.

Published information

The audit team found that, overall, reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards, but felt that more could be done to improve the consistency and completeness of school handbooks.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following features of good practice:

- the rigour of the external examiner nomination process for both taught and research degree provision; the thorough induction and briefing provided by the College for its external examiners, and the well-informed annual External Examiners Forum (paragraph 55)

- the strengthening of the College's quality assurance processes through the rigorous operation of the external examiner system and the involvement of independent external participants at institutional and course-level committees (paragraph 66)

- the arrangements for ensuring that the student body is represented on key committees within the College; the opportunities for the student voice to be heard and acted upon to the benefit of the College and the enhancement of the student experience, and the commitment of the student body to these arrangements (paragraph 112)

- the leadership and administrative support provided by the Graduate School for all postgraduate students (paragraph 187)

- the management and monitoring of the supervision, and the training and support provided for, postgraduate research students (paragraph 203).

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the College to:

- ensure that the implementation of the College's mechanisms for establishing, securing and maintaining the standards of awards becomes demonstrably equivalent for all taught programmes and that the recorded evidence relating to standards set, their monitoring, review and attainment is made more consistent and explicit (paragraph 40)

- ensure that where inconsistencies at course level in regulatory and other areas are identified, clear institutional action is taken to ensure they are resolved (paragraph 76)

- ensure that its arrangements for engaging with external reference points relating to standards are applied consistently across the College and are clearly articulated in its quality assurance processes (paragraph 94)

- review its programme monitoring and review processes, to ensure that the effectiveness of their operation, including appropriate actions, is evaluated at institutional level (paragraph 103)

- clarify further the respective functions of Academic Board, the Teaching Quality Committee and Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee with regard to the strategic oversight of its arrangements for assuring the standard of awards and enhancing learning opportunities, and that it ensures that members of these committees understand clearly their roles and responsibilities (paragraph 104)

- continue to prioritise and expedite the development of the integrated College-wide approach to the systematic collection, analysis, evaluation and use of management information at course and institutional level; and that, as part of this approach, the College moves rapidly towards a consistent and regulated approach to the identification, dating, attribution and registration of all relevant documents (paragraphs 86, 103, 108)

- review its current definition of collaborative provision, to encompass more accurately the range of activities which involve external providers (paragraph 182)

- review its collaborative provision procedures to clarify the evidence required from its collaborative partners, to give the College assurance that the standards and quality of the provision are fully met (paragraph 152).

It would be desirable for the College to:

- ensure that its arrangements for monitoring the implementation of the College's Learning and Teaching Strategy review the impact of the Strategy's initiatives on the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 92)

- manage actively the identification and exploitation of opportunities for enhancement, to ensure that its intention of making enhancement integral to its quality management processes is translated into action (paragraph 152).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   The Royal Veterinary College (the College) was founded in 1791 and became a constituent college of the University of London in 1949. Its mission is to be the premier veterinary school in the United Kingdom (UK) and among the best in the world. It is situated on two campuses, one north of the centre of London, the other in south Hertfordshire.

2   The majority of the College's teaching provision is focused on a five-year course leading to the professional degree of BVetMed. This accounted for 56 per cent of the College's student headcount in 2008-09 and 80 per cent of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) teaching income in that year.

3   In October 2008, the College had a total of 1,903 students of which 76.6 per cent were undergraduate and 23.4 per cent were postgraduate; 87 per cent were full-time and 13 per cent part-time (including distance learning); 91 per cent were home/European Union and 9 per cent were overseas, and 77 per cent were female and 23 per cent male. Full-time equivalent (FTE) staff numbers in 2008-09 were:

Academic	154.30
Research	69.88
Technical	99.12
Academic related	122.45
Clerical	143.52
Other	120.77
Total	**710.04**

4   The College is one of 19 colleges that comprise the federal University of London, although it is funded directly by HEFCE. University of London Ordinances authorise individual colleges to award taught degrees of the University of London. Research degree examinations continue to take place centrally under the auspices of the University of London.

The information base for the audit

5   As the audit was combined with scrutiny of the College's application for taught and research degree awarding powers, the information base included meetings with members of the College's governing body, staff and students of the College, external examiners and University of London representatives, as well as observation of a wide range of executive and deliberative committee meetings.

6   The main documentary evidence available to the audit team was the College's Application for Taught and Research Degree Awarding Powers prepared in September 2007, referred to in this report as the Application. This contained an appendix listing some 125 documents referenced in the Application itself. The audit team received a student written submission (SWS) and the College made further documents available to the audit team over the course of its enquiries.

Developments since the last audit

7   The College was the subject of a QAA audit in 2003 which produced an outcome of broad confidence. Features of good practice related to:

●   institutional systems for recognising, developing and rewarding the quality of teaching

●   the approach to developing e-learning and distance learning, and the supporting infrastructure that had been established

●   the development of a Professional Studies module within the BVetMed curriculum, as preparation for professional practice.

8   The following recommendations were considered 'advisable':

●   to consider developing the use of statistical information at programme level in evaluating quality and standards

●   to consider further whether current arrangements and the procedures for collaborative provision set out in the Manual are both consistent with the *Code of practice for the assurance of standards and quality in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, and sufficiently robust to support an expanding portfolio of activities in this area.

9   The College was also the subject of a QAA Review of research degree programmes in 2006. The conclusion of that review was that the institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programmes was appropriate and satisfactory.

10   At the time of the 2003 audit, the College had 950 FTE students, of which 749 were following the BVetMed programme. There were 113 full or part-time taught postgraduate students, and 47 full-time and 23 part-time research postgraduates. There were 95 FTE academic staff in 2002-03 and 46 research staff. It will be seen, therefore, that there has been a significant growth in the both student and staff numbers since the previous audit (see paragraph 3).

11   In 2005, the College added a 'Year Zero' entry level to its five-year BVetMed (called the Gateway Programme) and also created an accelerated four-year graduate entry route. Since 2003, the College has established a Foundation Degree in Veterinary Nursing (taught jointly with the College of Animal Welfare), MSc and Postgraduate Diploma (PgDip) courses in the control of infectious diseases in animals, designed in collaboration with the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, an MSc in Wild Animal Biology offered jointly with the Zoological Society of London for

a University of London degree awarded by the College, and an MSc and PgDip in veterinary epidemiology and public health as part of the University of London's external programme. In 2007, the College closed its intake of students to a four-year BSc in Veterinary Nursing run jointly with the College of Animal Welfare and Middlesex University.

12   Recent changes to College governance and management reported by the College include:

● strengthening the Senior Management Group (SMG), from an informal meeting between the Principal and heads of department to the main executive body responsible for the implementation of College strategies

● restructuring academic and support departments; there are currently three academic departments (Pathology and Infectious Diseases, Veterinary Basic Sciences, Veterinary Clinical Sciences), 10 'support structures' and seven academic support and development units

● redefining the boundaries between central and departmental responsibilities, for example, in course development and curriculum change, and in the responsibility of the Graduate School for aspects of postgraduate provision

● a major revision of the committee structure, as part of a deliberate, strategic approach to achieving progress

● greater professionalism among its administrative and managerial units.

13   The College has put in place marking schemes containing detailed statements of assessment procedures for each course, together with narrative definitions of marks awarded for each type of assessment instrument. The latter began with a common 10-point scheme applied across all courses, but this is currently being replaced by a 17-point scheme. The new scheme is being used in the BSc Bioveterinary Sciences course and is in the process of being rolled out to other courses.

The institution's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

14   The College awards degrees of the University of London in accordance with the University's Ordinances. The relevant Ordinances cover: degrees and other awards granted by the University (Ordinance No 12); the award of degrees, diplomas and certificates (No 13); academic standards and quality assurance (No 14); and quality assurance procedures and degree regulations (No 15).

15   In order to exercise these powers, colleges of the University are required to have established their own regulations, within the broad framework set down in the Ordinances, and to have lodged a copy of their quality assurance procedures with the Vice-Chancellor of the University of London. Within this framework, the College has full powers over, inter alia, its regulations, the approval of new programmes, examination boards, examination arrangements and external examiners and their reports. The University of London retains the right to approve the establishment of degrees offered jointly with other institutions, aspects of research degree examinations including the formal appointment of external examiners, the awarding function for distance-learning degrees, including the relevant regulations, and examination offences.

16   The College has its own set of regulations, including those governing individual courses. In May 2008, the Academic Board of the College approved revised versions of a wide range of institution-level regulations covering general regulations for internal students of the College; credit and credit accumulation; the assessment of prior learning and admission with advanced standing; general assessment regulations for taught courses; instructions for the conduct of examinations and the assessment for taught degrees; academic misconduct; a Code of Professional Standards (Students) and the College's procedure in respect of professional requirements.

17   The College's academic regulations are comprehensive and are set out in the College's Quality Assurance (QA) Handbook. The College intends its regulatory framework to be flexible so as '…to take account of the particular characteristics of specific degree courses…'.

18   The College's Academic Registrar is the custodian of its academic regulatory framework. The regulations are reviewed periodically by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (LTAC), the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) and by the Academic Registrar. Changes to the regulations require the approval of Academic Board. Exceptions to this are regulations regarding distance learning and research degrees, which are monitored by the central administration of the University of London.

19   Regulations for the management and delivery of degrees offered jointly with partner organisations are defined in memoranda of cooperation and each partner has a clearly defined role and set of responsibilities; memoranda are approved by Academic Board. The College takes primary responsibility for standards in all cases, with the exception of modules taken by College students at King's College London, which come under that institution's quality framework.

20   The BVetMed course, an undergraduate bachelors degree, is recognised by QAA and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons as being equivalent to an award at master's level (see also paragraph 30).

21   The College's goal is to provide the best possible courses, and to maintain the highest standards in its awards. Its application indicated that the College has developed its course management and quality assurance processes to guarantee that all aspects of provision are treated equitably and appropriately. There is, however, no common modular structure for taught degrees and each programme has bespoke assessment regulations within the broad College framework, with the definition and application of credit being dependent on an approved statement made relatively recently (May 2008). Standards of assessment are monitored by a board of examiners for each course, according to College regulatory and guidance documents.

22   Ultimate responsibility for academic matters lies with Academic Board (chaired by the College Principal). The Council receives advice from the Board on all academic matters. As such, the Board was presented to the audit team as the body with responsibility for award standards. Under this overarching responsibility, LTAC develops and oversees the provision of taught courses and the Teaching Quality Committee (TQC) assures the quality of courses and the standard of the College's awards. The Terms of Reference of TQC include the requirement to '…develop and monitor the implementation of procedures for the assurance of the academic standards of taught awards made by the College…' and '…to recommend to Academic Board the appointment of external examiners and to ensure that the College responds appropriately to their reports…'.

23   Similarly, RDC is responsible for assuring the quality and standards of research degrees and for making recommendations on their award. Its Terms of Reference require it to '…develop, implement and monitor policies, procedures and regulations in respect of research degrees and for the assurance of the academic standards of research awards made by the College…'.

24   Each of these committees reports directly to Academic Board. Course management committees are standing committees of LTAC.

25   The College's Application indicated that '…the courses, and the awards to which they lead, are owned by the College collectively, through the Academic Board…'. College committee representatives, course management committee representatives and senior staff indicated that accountability for award standards resides at local level with course management committees, and boards of examiners. From its observations and considerations, the audit team found that a relatively 'light touch' oversight of issues/trends relating to awards standards was exercised by the College level committees LTAC and TQC. Moreover, the observation of, and documentation arising from meetings of LTAC and TQC illustrated a variability in the quality of record keeping

from course management committees across the College, which has the potential to introduce inconsistencies into the exercise of this accountability.

26   The College acknowledges that its current strategies are evolving, particularly in the light of the recent revision of its committee structures, including the establishment of TQC, whose ongoing development was noted by its external member. The fact that the BVetMed course is no longer the distinctive focus of its taught provision is also relevant.

27   The operation of the new committee structure has recently been reviewed. The audit team found, however, that this review was largely a collection of descriptions of procedures, rather than an in-depth examination of the effectiveness of the committees and their work.

28   From its discussions with staff and by observing the work of committees, the audit team concluded that further clarity is required between Academic Board, TQC and LTAC with regard to responsibilities for quality and standards, and in their responsibilities for strategy, oversight and action. In particular, the team detected uncertainty about the extent to which TQC should be discussing the detail of the information it receives, rather than concentrating on oversight of College and course-level responses. The team formed the view that the new committee structure still has some way to go before it reaches maturity, and encourages the College to continue to review the operation and effectiveness of its committees.

29   The audit team also found that a large number of documents it examined including, policies, statements of procedure, summaries of management information and feedback reports, some of which had been presented to College committees for discussion or note, were undated and/or unattributed. It recommends that the College moves rapidly towards a more consistent and regulated approach to registering and identifying all documents, and that documents associated with individual committees are clearly identified as such.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

30   In its application, the College indicated that '…academic standards are defined initially through reference to the College's regulatory framework which specifies criteria for each degree; these parallel those set out in the FHEQ...'. The College confirms, through the process of course design and approval and the definition of the overall learning objectives for both course and individual components, the need for these to be defined at a level consistent with the standard of the award. In particular, the College recognises that the BVetMed, because it is used for professional registration purposes, is at a 'level' higher than that normally expected of a bachelor's degree (for example, BSc) and that the benchmark statement indicates this level to be equivalent to a master's degree. Special meetings of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (LTAC) were previously convened to address new proposals, although more recently special panels drawn from LTAC, The Teaching Quality Committee (TQC) and external representatives are constituted for the purpose. Requirements for approval set out in the QA Handbook require proposals to include mapping to benchmarks and the FHEQ, and to include draft programme specifications. A particular objective of LTAC's consideration of a new programme is '…the definition and appropriateness of standards in accordance with the level and title of the award…'.

Approval of new courses

31   The audit team scrutinised documentation relating to the validation of two new courses that had been approved recently, one at undergraduate and one at postgraduate level. In the case of the Graduate Diploma in Professional and Clinical Veterinary Nursing one of three objectives for the validation was '… to consider whether the proposal meets the expectations

of relevant subject benchmark statements, the framework for higher education qualifications, and the requirements of appropriate professional and statutory bodies...'. The relevant standards-related reference points from QAA were circulated to panel members, who included two external members, as part of the process. Validation, with recommendations, was granted, despite some subject to the assessment matters being resolved. The approval included '… confirmation that the proposal met the expectations of the relevant subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ at level 3...'. There were no substantive recommendations relating to issues of standards.

32   In the second case considered by the audit team, the proposal document was less comprehensive and informative, and the validation report was less able to demonstrate a robust scrutiny or rigorous appraisal of the actions taken to address the issues raised by the panel. In this case, in contrast to the previous case, the course validation documentation did not convey clearly the links between the objectives of the approval exercise and the recorded outcomes. The outcomes with respect to award standards were less than explicitly stated, although external involvement did imply that the standards of the award were endorsed.

33   Thus, in relation to the programme validation process, the documentation available to the team varied in the extent to which it explained how the process confirmed engagement with internal and external reference points relevant to the establishment of award standards. In both cases, all panel members received advice from the College about the external reference points to be used in the programme validation process. The involvement of externals provides independent comment on, if not explicit, endorsement of award standards.

Course monitoring

34   The audit team also scrutinised documentation relating to a number of module reviews and course annual reports. Module leaders undertake annual module reviews using a College template. These reports then feed into the relevant year/phase leader annual report. Both report types are subsequently considered by the appropriate course management committee before being submitted to TQC. Observation of TQC proceedings revealed inconsistency in the approach to the completion of module review and annual course reports. This was noted by the Committee itself, which agreed that, in future, the need to state more explicit expectations should be addressed through the evolutionary development of the institutional template, now in train and the circulation of best practice exemplars. The value added by TQC scrutiny, in addition to formal feedback given to course management committees on the outcomes of the process, was not readily discernable from the documentation available to the audit team, nor was it possible through the observation of TQC meetings to establish any formal link between its consideration of external examiners' reports, the responses made to them and the operation of the annual monitoring process.

35   The audit team noted that module review documentation is variable in content, with differing degrees of scrutiny being given to reports at course management committee level, with the consequence that this consideration, in general, fails to contribute to the stated purposes of monitoring and review.

36   From its overview of the relevant documentation, the audit team concluded that the module review and annual review reports were operationally focused, with an implicit consideration of award standards. A more explicit consideration of issues relating to award standards was, in the view of the team, hampered by the lack of comprehensive and integrated academic management information, including evidenced analyses of performance and comparisons (see paragraphs 82 to 84, where this is considered in more detail).

Periodic review

37   The College's stated aim for the quinquennial review (QQR) process is to confirm that awards are of an appropriate standard. The review process and its objectives are set out in the QA Handbook. The QQR panel, which includes external members, meets with staff, current and former students and tours teaching facilities. The documentation available to review panels includes a self-evaluation document, copies of previous annual reports, external examiners' reports and responses, course handbooks and examples of student work. The audit team scrutinised three sets of documents relating to different QQRs and observed the panel proceedings in one instance. In this last case, it was the view of the team that the process was somewhat mechanistic and did not provide a demonstrable evaluation of standards, quality and the nature of the learning process and experience. The review documentation did, nevertheless, outline how the course complied with the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmarks, described the central role played by external examiners, and addressed the effectiveness of assessment. Although the documentation described the mechanisms used for securing standards, this was not addressed rigorously and systematically at the panel meeting, neither was there an explicit analysis of performance data. Similarly, the report of the outcomes in the two remaining cases did not suggest that all the required evidence had been subject to systematic evaluation.

38   Although standards-related matters were addressed in the documentation presented to each QQR panel in the examples seen by the audit team, there was little explicit confirmation of the standards claimed. The audit team concluded, therefore, that the QQR process demonstrated an implicit rather than explicit endorsement of standards. Although the involvement of externals could be taken to imply the independent endorsement of standards, the documentation available to the audit team did not make this clear (see also paragraphs 55 and 56).

Outcomes

39   In relation to the handling of the outcomes of the College's approval, monitoring and review processes the audit team formed the view that the TQC's formal handling of reports and related information is less than fully effective. In particular, the reports arising from these processes did not indicate whether any trends were emerging that were of importance at institutional, rather than merely at course level. Further, although the approval, monitoring and review processes operated by the College are sound in themselves, their objectives and the outcomes recorded as arising from them are not always linked.

40   The approval, monitoring and review processes, in combination with a scrupulous and rigorous use of external examiners (see paragraphs 41 to 56), are able to address matters relevant to the standards of awards of individual courses, all of which exhibit threshold standards. However, the variability in the quality of engagement with these processes, demonstrated by the documentation available, did not allow the audit team to form an unambiguous view of the consistency and comparability of award standards across the College's taught provision.

External examiners

41   In its Application the College advances its view that '…external examiners play a vital role in assuring standards…'. The audit team tested the validity of this view through its analysis of the operation of the relevant provisions of the College's regulations and guidelines.

Roles and responsibilities

42   The College listed the roles and responsibilities of its external examiners in its Application, and in a document entitled, Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations and Assessments. This list emphasises the operational aspects of assessment, but does not contain any explicit provision related to confirmation by external examiners of the standards of the awards made. Instead, standards are mentioned with respect to the standard of marking. However, the current external

examiner report form offers the opportunity to confirm that the '…standards set for the awards are appropriate for qualifications at this level in this subject...'. The report form allows external examiners to confirm the fulfilment of the roles and responsibilities listed above. Reports made available to the team demonstrated the conscientious and thorough way in which examiners were fulfilling these roles and responsibilities.

Nomination and appointment

43   The external examiner nomination form used by the College sets out clear criteria for their appointment. Each nomination form must be endorsed by the chair of the relevant board of examiners, the Chair of TQC and the Chair of Academic Board (the full criteria for appointment being re-iterated on the form). All nomination proposals are subject to scrutiny by TQC. Recommendations from TQC are referred to Academic Board for the formal appointment of external examiners, who report formally to the Principal as Chair of Academic Board. From its observation of the relevant documentation and observation of the process in operation at TQC, the audit team concluded that the scrutiny afforded by this Committee was rigorous and its oversight represented a particular strength of the College's external examiner system.

44   External examiners for taught programmes are appointed for three years with one extra year on request, followed by a bar for at least one year. Academic Board approves the appointment of internal and external examiners proposed by course management committees, in the latter case on the basis of recommendations from TQC. In addition to the scrutiny given to nominations by this Committee, observation of the proceedings of Academic Board indicated rigorous consideration of external examiner nominations at that level, demonstrating a further strength of the appointment process.

45   The audit team noted thorough consideration of nominees for research degree external examiners, together with a similarly thorough scrutiny of those nominations by the Research Degree Committee (RDC). The RDC papers showed that a longitudinal view was taken of those appointed as research degree examiners with the data illustrating a list of well qualified individuals. The consideration given to individual nominations was rigorous and included, under reserved business, scrutiny of the full nomination documentation. The Terms of Reference of the Committee include the requirement to '…recommend to Academic Board the appointment of examiners for the awards of MPhil, PhD and DVetMed, to consider their reports and to ensure that the College responds appropriately...'. Evidence from the Committee proceedings seen by the audit team indicated that it is achieving these objectives.

Briefing and support

46   On appointment, external examiners receive a briefing letter from the College. The letter directs prospective examiners to the College's external examiners' website, which gives them access to necessary background information, regulations and forms.

47   A day-long Examiners Induction (Forum), to which all external and internal examiners are invited, has been in place since 2001. Progressively, this event has come to encompass all taught courses. Observation of an External Examiners Forum confirmed its emphasis on the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, the FHEQ, other appropriate external reference points and the College's regulations. It made clear that external examiners are appointed to be both external subject specialists and auditors of the overall assessment process. The College supplied the audit team with all the visual material used in both the generic and specialised, course-specific, sections of the Forum. The Forum and other related evidence demonstrated the strong use made of external examiners to monitor the reliability of assessment.

48   The external examiners who attended the Forum were well briefed and well informed, and they were invited to contribute actively to the development and enhancement of the College's assessment processes. The audit team considers that the record of the proceedings of TQC illustrates a thorough scrutiny of external examiner appointments and their reports, and the College's summary of responses. The TQC also receives an annual overview of external examiner summaries. Those summaries seen by the team recorded external examiners unanimous endorsement of the comparability of standards, but added little to the existing annual monitoring reports considered by the College.

Reporting requirements

49   External examiners are required to report annually using a common format report form for all taught provision, with fee payment being contingent upon receipt of the report. The reporting includes, inter alia, an opportunity to confirm that the '…standard of assessment is appropriate …'. External examiners report to the Principal through the Quality Assurance Manager. The Manager undertakes an analysis of all reports and forwards them to the chair of the relevant board of examiners and course management committee, highlighting issues needing attention. Proposed responses, as approved by the relevant course management committee, are then submitted to TQC for approval before return to the external examiner.

Use made of reports

50   In addition to considering all reports, the TQC is responsible for ensuring that action is taken on those reports by chairs of boards of examiners and course management committees. External examiners are invited to comment on the actions arising from responses to their reports. Summaries of external examiners' reports and the College's agreed response are submitted to Academic Board which also receives an annual summary of recurring and generic issues noted in external examiner reports. The 2006 summary was dominated by positive comments and, in the view of the audit team, was lacking in critical analysis. It, therefore, added little to the critical evaluation of the College's position with respect to its assessment and examination practices. The team also felt that Academic Board concentrated on operational matters relating to individual programmes and was less able to identify cross-cutting principles with potential value at institutional level.

51   The audit team noted that the external examiner reports, with responses, received by TQC were detailed and thoughtful, but it was not always clear who had prepared the responses to them. The Committee also demonstrated good oversight of external examiner appointments, as did RDC as the equivalent body with responsibility for postgraduate research degree appointments.

52   At the time of the audit it had been determined that in future the RDC and the Graduate School would receive all external examiner reports for postgraduate research degree examinations. Previously, the Head of the Graduate School alone considered and reviewed these reports.

Feedback

53   The College provides students with access to external examiner reports through their membership of course management committees, TQC and RDC. However, the audit team agrees with the College's view that the feedback cycle of responses to external examiners' reports is sometimes protracted.

Collaborative arrangements

54   Courses delivered collaboratively are dealt with through established in-house procedures.

Overview

55   The rigour of the external examiner nomination process for both taught and research degree provision, the thorough induction and briefing provided by the College for its external examiners and the well-informed annual External Examiners Forum are considered by the audit team to represent good practice.

56   The College's external examiner system is central to the assurance of award standards. The views of examiners are taken seriously and acted upon. Its effectiveness, however, remains at the level of individual programmes; cross-institutional evaluation is less well developed. The links between the external examiner system and annual monitoring, where they exist, largely reflect the small size of the institution. The successful operation of the external examiner system in confirming standards contrasts with the more implicit standards-related outcomes from the College's other quality assurance processes (see paragraphs 33 to 36 and 38 to 40 in particular). Taken together, however, the evidence available, outlined in this and other sections of this report, allowed the team to express confidence in the capacity of the College to manage the current and future security of the standard of its awards.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*

57   The TQC is responsible for ensuring that the College addresses the expectations of the *Code of practice*. As sections of the *Code* have been published and/or revised, TQC has reviewed them and addressed any deficiencies in the College's procedures. The audit team formed the view that, in general, engagement with the *Code of practice* is appropriate and is particularly strong with those sections of the *Code* dealing with external examiners and with the assessment of students.

FHEQ

58   The College indicates that the criteria for its awards, as set out in its Regulations, parallel those of the FHEQ, with new course proposals being required to meet the expectations of the FHEQ. QQR panels are also required to review academic standards with reference to the FHEQ and external examiners are directed to the FHEQ as a reference point. The audit team verified the implementation of these provisions. Their implementation in respect of the operation of approval, monitoring and review processes is evaluated in more detail elsewhere (see paragraphs 30 to 40).

Subject benchmark statements

59   Subject benchmark statements have been integrated into the College's quality assurance processes, particularly in the case of new course proposals, which are required to demonstrate how they meet the relevant expectations. QQR panels are asked to review a course's relationship to any relevant subject benchmark(s). These are also drawn to the attention of external examiners. A programme specification template identifies relevant subject benchmarks. Implementation of these requirements is in general appropriate, as noted below.

Programme specifications

60   Programme specifications are central to the process of new course approval and are available to students. The College's Programme Specification template makes links between the stated learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment strategy. Strengthening these links is considered a key aspect of maintaining standards. Course management committees now review

and approve programme specifications annually. The template that has been adopted, and the programme specifications seen by the audit team, demonstrates that these links are appropriately made. There is also ample evidence that programme specifications are seen and approved by LTAC, thus maintaining an overview by the College.

Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRB) requirements

61   College courses that lead to vocational/professional awards are subject to periodic inspection and approval by PSRBs, including the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE), and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). Programme specifications are set by course management committees in the light of external reference points, and are reviewed annually.

62   In its application, the College stated that '…there is an essential link between the College's standards and the requirements of the professional bodies which recognise our courses …our standards must, at least, match their expectations, and this establishes a point of reference against which the standards for all our courses are calibrated...'. The audit team's discussions with staff confirm that the College holds the requirements of PSRBs in high regard and considers it essential that the expectations of the relevant bodies are fully satisfied.

63   The BVetMed provision of the College is accredited by RCVS and AVMA. The most recent visitation from RCVS and its European equivalent, EAEVE, was in 2000 following the previous visit in 1990. The re-accreditation visit will be in 2010. Given the time since the last EAEVE accreditation report, it was not possible for the audit team to discern how the College had dealt with the issues arising from the report, although the College indicated that the next report would be dealt with formally by its newly constituted LTAC. The AVMA re-accreditation visit took place in 2005. Although alignment with the requirements of these PSRBs is a key part of the College's culture, it was difficult for the team to discover what specific evidence or procedure supported its claim that the expectations of these bodies '…establishes a point of reference against which the standards for all our courses are calibrated…'.

Externality

64   The inclusion of a person external to the College in the membership of TQC is a significant aspect of externality noted by the audit team in relation to the security of award standards. The external member's annual report to the Committee represents an important contribution to the capacity of the Committee to evaluate its activities and effectiveness. External stakeholders, often with relevant professional affiliations, also form part of the membership of course management committees and bring important additional perspectives to bear on the discussions of these committees.

65   The external members of course management committees and other external advisers also become involved in a variety of activities relating to standards. These activities can include the development and validation of courses and the consideration of assessment criteria, giving these externals direct involvement in the establishment and maintenance of standards during the development of proposals for academic approval. In this latter respect, College and lay members of the College Council are also able to comment on new course proposals. College members of Council may be internal members of QQR panels and, exceptionally, an external member of Council may also be a member of a QQR panel. External examiners also have the opportunity to comment on wider aspects of College provision including, for example, the content of modules and the links between that content and staff research and scholarship. From these examples and other evidence referred to elsewhere on this report, the audit team concluded that the College has a particularly strong engagement, with well-qualified, independent external persons in a wide range of College activities relevant to the security of award standards.

Overview

66   The external reference points used by the College are clearly signalled in its procedures. However, explicit demonstration of due consideration to these external reference points in output documents is often lacking. As a result, demonstration of real engagement with the reference points is sometimes less than clear. The College has recognised some of these issues. Academic Board and TQC, for example, have highlighted variability in annual reports and the need for the College to clarify expectations of this and other processes to those involved in their implementation, in order to be able to demonstrate that alignment with external reference points is an integral element in the operation of the relevant processes. Nevertheless, the involvement of independent external participants in a wide range of College processes and other standards, and quality-related activities on institutional and course-level committees, is considered by the audit team to represent a feature of good practice.

Assessment policies and regulations

Assessment policies

67   The College indicates that its assessment schemes '…must be devised in a manner which enables the examiners to judge whether candidates have achieved the required standard…'. A new Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy was finalised early in 2008 and approved by Academic Board in May 2008 replacing the previous Strategy for the period 2002-2006. The College also has a Student Assessment Policy, which has been integrated into the new LTA Strategy. In addition, assessment regulations have been reviewed in the recent past.

68   The Student Assessment Policy consists of a series of statements, but does not relate these to potential actions or indicate how the aspirations contained in the document might be realised. However, the new LTA Strategy is currently being considered by a working group to identify actions to be taken and those responsible for them. Given that the process of converting this Strategy into specific action plans is ongoing, it was difficult for the audit team to ascertain how the provisions of the Strategy would be implemented and how its aspirations would be delivered and managed at local level. The audit team recognises that the College is now taking steps formally to manage the implementation of this Strategy as its academic portfolio becomes more complex.

Boards of examiners

69   The College's Application notes that checks on standards are in place primarily through the activities of boards of examiners and external examiners. The audit team, having considered the documentation relating to these two sets of activities, concluded that collective decisions and judgements on the performance of students are taken appropriately, but that consideration of standards for awards is often implicit rather than explicit, with formal confirmation of awards sometimes being absent from meetings and records.

70   The conduct of boards of examiners is described in a document entitled, Good Practice for Boards of Examiners, which contains helpful and relevant advice in its appendices. Boards are also regulated by another document entitled, Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations and Assessments. Boards of examiners report formally to Academic Board via the submission of pass lists. The minutes of boards of examiners are prepared by central College staff using a common format and contain sufficient information for proceedings to be monitored effectively.

71   The 'Instructions', referred to above, contain sections on the terms of reference and appointment of boards of examiners; the appointment of external examiners; the conduct of meetings, setting and producing examination papers; oral examinations; marking; retention of scripts, and publication of results. They require results to be determined in accordance with the approved regulations for the course, which are themselves approved by Academic Board, and indicate, in turn, that chairs of boards of examiners should be senior and not involved in the

assessment of students for the course in question. This is in contrast to the statement in the application document, to the effect that a review of the position with respect to examination board chairs and their prior involvement with assessment is under consideration by Academic Board. Examinations and assessments across the College are organised through the Academic Registry, which also supports the data provided to boards of examiners and their overall conduct. From the documentation available to it, and from its observations of a selection of boards of examiners, the audit team concluded that the conduct of these boards is satisfactory, a particular strength being the role played in them by external examiners.

Assessment regulations

72   The College has addressed assessment in general over the recent past (see paragraph 67) and the outcomes of a working group on assessment have been considered in detail by LTAC. In particular, its consideration led to the production of updated versions of the general College Academic Regulations, the good practice guidance for boards of examiners and other documents relevant to assessment. In early 2008, LTAC considered a formal update of the document entitled, Implementation of Changes to Assessment, which covered a variety of actions to be delegated to course management committees in support of 'convergence' of practice, which was being promoted by the Committee. The audit team was told that LTAC would be monitoring the adoption of changes by course management committees and would be responsible for considering any applications for exemption.

73   The College's Academic Regulations provide a framework covering standards in which these are related to the FHEQ level descriptors. Each course, and in the case of BVetMed, each examination, has a marking scheme, approved annually by Academic Board. There are College marking criteria for examination questions and other forms of assessment, often called the common grading scheme. It covers 17 points from 0-100 inclusive and relates marks to descriptors. The minutes of Academic Board show that a common marking scheme was considered and approved for 2007-08 and that model answers are required. This scheme has generated considerable comment from external examiners, although the College wishes to allow it to become more embedded before considering the introduction of further changes.

74   Marking schemes are included in all course handbooks and are disseminated additionally via the internet and the College's virtual learning environment. The marking scheme for each course forms part of its programme specification and is provided to students at the start of each session. The inclusion of this information in course handbooks has been confirmed by the team, which also saw evidence that marking schemes are seen and approved by LTAC and considered in detail by course management committees.

75   The student written submission (SWS) confirmed the general availability, through student handbooks or their equivalent, of assessment information for students. Some minor concerns about the level of detail and timing with respect to one course and, across the board, with regard to consistency of expectation with respect to project work were, however, mentioned in the SWS. The audit team noted that this latter issue had remained unresolved for some considerable time, despite having being discussed at a number of levels, not least at Academic Board, which appeared to have been unwilling to determine whether the management of issues such as this was best undertaken at course or college level.

76   In May 2007, Academic Board approved the detailed requirements for project marking and requirements for the sampling of examination scripts for moderation. This confirmed that undergraduate and taught postgraduate project work should be double-marked and also indicated that final year, summative module assessments should be blind double-marked, with other assessments being sampled by experienced markers in prescribed ratios. Notwithstanding such contributions to consistency of practice, TQC identified anomalies in resit policies between courses, a fact that was also commented upon in external examiner reports. However, in

common with the situation noted above, the Committee was unable to resolve the matter. The audit team advises, therefore, that where inconsistencies at course level in regulatory and other areas are identified, clear institutional action is taken to ensure they are resolved.

Revisions to assessment regulations

77   Changes to assessment regulations require approval by LTAC or RDC as appropriate, and Academic Board. Changes can be made throughout the academic year for implementation, either immediately, or from the following academic session, subject to the application of the principle of no detriment to existing students on the courses involved. Proposals for changes to course-level regulations come from course management committees and are received and considered by LTAC. However, the quality of the information available in support of proposed changes, based on scrutiny of the minutes of course management committees, varies.

Collaborative arrangements

78   Collaborative partners are represented on relevant course management committees and staff from partner institutions may be appointed to boards of examiners. This puts the management of programmes with collaborative elements firmly within the College's quality assurance framework (see also Section 5).

Research students

79   Documentation available to the audit team suggested that research student administration, including assessment had, de facto, been devolved to the College by the University of London, with the relevant regulations aligned to the FHEQ and *Code of practice*. The College's Graduate School provides a central structure for the management of postgraduate provision including: the postgraduate prospectus; the selection of students; admissions; including induction, registration; progress monitoring; degree examination entry; the Code of Practice for Students; student logs; the PhD skills training programme; the Postgraduate Academic Progress Committee, annual student surveys and prizes.

80   Registration of students is initially for MPhil, with a formal upgrade to PhD subject to successful appraisal. The annual appraisal system for considering the progress of research students is well established, with appraisal reports being reviewed by the Head of the Graduate School. The College reviewed its framework for the management of postgraduate students and their assessment as part of the 2006 HEFCE Review of research degree provision.

81   The audit team formed the view that the practice of assessment for postgraduate research students is robust.

Management information (including progression and completion statistics)

82   The audit team requested a range of academic management information as part of the documentation for its visit in October 2008. The document produced, entitled Management information covering admission, progression and completion statistics, contained information on courses at foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate taught level. The data provided did not cover the academic year 2007-08 and was not user-friendly, particularly with respect to its potential use in quality assurance monitoring and review processes. In some cases, progression and completion data was absent. In general, the data was considered by the team to be inadequate in terms of currency, completeness and focus, to support effectively the College's quality assurance processes.

Student statistics

83   The terms of reference for course management committees include the requirement '…to scrutinise trends in the performance of students throughout the course/s and to propose any consequent action…'. The Terms of Reference of the TQC require the Committee to '…review academic performance indicators and to ensure that they are acted upon…'. Notwithstanding these requirements, a meeting with Committee representatives indicated that there was little central organisation of management information. It appeared to be the responsibility of course leaders to acquire this. Scrutiny of College-level committee proceedings confirmed the general impression gained by the audit team of little College-wide use of academic management information, particularly student data. When asked about this, senior representatives of the College described the steps being taken to prepare routine, annual statistics reports for TQC. The first draft of these anticipated reports was in preparation at the time of the audit visit. Additionally, the team formed the view that the statistical evidence available to the RDC was inadequate as evidence upon which the overall monitoring of quality and standards for postgraduate students. For example, annual postgraduate research student completion rates were monitored through responses to studentship bids to research councils, rather than by internally generated statistics.

84   The College's Application conceded that it could use examination statistics better. Although boards of examiners receive data on means, medians and standard deviations in relation to performance outcomes by each student cohort, little time appeared to be made available for its consideration at examination board meetings.

Development and implementation of strategy

85   The Information Technology (IT) Department provides a central College resource to support the development and management of management information systems. The College uses SITS as its Student Information Management System, but acknowledges that the management of information could be more robust and comprehensive, particularly in relation to student progression. The audit team also formed the view that sharing management information with collaborative partners was not strong. Improvements in data provision and analysis are, however, expected, although they were not in place at the time of the audit.

Overview

86   Progress in the production of relevant and integrated academic management information of value to the maintenance of standards and the development of learning opportunities has been limited since the situation was commented upon in the previous audit report. Although some progress is in train with respect to the production of student statistical data, this has still to be approved formally by the relevant committee. The audit team also found little evidence that this data is to be integrated into a broader approach to the provision of academic management information that would encompass other evidence arising from diverse sources including, for example, student surveys. The audit team advises, therefore, that the College continues to prioritise and expedite the development of an integrated College-wide approach to the systematic collection, analysis, evaluation and use of management information at course and institutional level (see also paragraph 103).

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

The institution's framework for managing the quality of learning opportunities

87   The College defines its approach to the management of quality in a Quality Assurance Strategy, currently under review, and an interim Strategy Statement. It provides procedural guidance to its staff in its QA Handbook. Its objectives for managing the quality of learning opportunities are to: assure the quality of its degrees; deliver high-quality courses of study and

enable students to achieve stated learning outcomes; meet the expectations of stakeholders, including students, employers and the wider community; satisfy the requirements of professional bodies, and implement good practice, especially as represented in the *Code of practice*.

88   Responsibility for the assurance of quality is delegated by Academic Board to the Teaching Quality Committee (TQC). The responsibilities of this Committee have already been summarised (see paragraph 22).

89   Other elements of the College's quality management structure include: course management committees report to the Learning, teaching and Assessment Committee (LTAC) but also submit an annual report to TQC; the Campus Services Committee, a forum for student-staff discussion; student representation on Academic Board and its subcommittees, and staff, student and other stakeholder representation, including external advisers, on all College committees and working groups where appropriate. The TQC also has an external expert among its membership.

Learning, teaching and assessment strategy

90   The College refers to its Vision '…to be the premier veterinary school in the UK and among the best world-wide…' as underpinning '…its approach to the quality of its educational provision…'. The latest version of the College's Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy 2008-2013, aims to deliver '…excellent education through the best methods and progressive practice…'. Its objectives are: to optimise the quality of teaching and learning; to promote independent learning and the acquisition of course-specific and generic skills, and develop the learning environment, in particular student support arrangements, to suit a more diverse student body. The Strategy also sets out a number of initiatives for quality enhancement, (see paragraph 151) and references other College strategies such as Human Resources, IT, Information, Research, E-learning, Student support and Guidance and Estates as supporting this.

91   In its application, the College stated that although it has had a Teaching and Learning Strategy in place since 1998, the later versions have been deliberative pronouncements rather than statements of de facto practices. The audit team recognised that the current Strategy had taken into account the changes in the College's academic portfolio, in particular, diversification away from BVetMed, and the establishment of the Lifelong and Independent Veterinary Education (LIVE) Centre (see paragraph 122). The Corporate Plan for 2009-2013 was published at the end of the audit. Unlike the previous Plan, it contained specific references to the delivery of the LTA Strategy and how this will help realise the Plan's strategic aims.

92   Staff who met with the audit team confirmed that an action plan to operationalise the LTA Strategy's objectives was being drafted. Specific actions would be required by course management committees, monitored via an annual report to the LTAC. This, and the references to the LTA Strategy in the Corporate Plan, was reassuring for the team. Prior to this, the team had not been able to identify an implementation plan for the Strategy, which could be used in the annual monitoring and quinquennial review (QQR) processes to assess achievements and enable a systematic evaluation of the strategy's effectiveness in improving the quality of learning opportunities across all provision to be made. Given this, the team would encourage the College to ensure that its arrangements for monitoring the implementation of its LTA Strategy review the impact of the Strategy's initiatives on the quality of learning opportunities.

93   The TQC is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of the *Code of practice* and the *European Standards and Guidelines* are addressed and embedded in institutional policies and practices. It is also responsible for ensuring their continued, effective implementation, including within the QQR process. Matters relating to research students are referred to the Research Degrees Committee (RDC). Having scrutinised relevant committee minutes and other documentary evidence, the audit team concluded that, while securing initial alignment is being conducted diligently through the various committees, ongoing alignment is not specifically referred to in reports of QQRs.

94   As already noted (see paragraph 61), the College is subject to regular professional and statutory body visits by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE), and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). Staff who met with the audit team indicated that any issues raised at accreditation visits and requiring responses are considered by course management committees in the first instance, and then reported to LTAC or Academic Board. Formal responses to professional bodies are authorised by the Principal. While responses to external accreditations have clearly been made, the team was not able to establish, partly due to the College's practice of not attributing documents, how this process operated, or how actions were taken and their impact on the quality of the learning opportunities are monitored at the institutional level. The team advises the College to ensure that its arrangements for engaging with external reference points relating to standards are applied consistently across the College, and are clearly articulated in its quality assurance processes.

95   To guard against introspection, and especially because of its mono-disciplinary nature, the College has made a point of ensuring that there is external input into its quality assurance processes (see also paragraphs 64 and 65). A particular and distinctive feature is the inclusion of external members on course management committees and those committees reporting to Academic Board. Such members are full members of the committees on which they sit and are not always subject specialists. The audit team was able to confirm the value of this process in providing an independent, objective and wider view of the management of learning opportunities and an approach to pedagogy through external members' annual reports and input to the meetings. The team considered that the involvement of independent external participants at institutional and course-level committees strengthened the College's quality management arrangements and commends it as a feature of good practice.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

96   New course developments are usually centrally driven. The two-stage process requires initial approval in principle by Academic Board, on recommendation of the LTAC for taught courses and the RDC for research-based courses, of the academic aspects of a course. The Senior Management Group (SMG) then gives approval from a business plan/resources perspective before proceeding with the detailed validation second stage.

97   The audit team considered the way this process was implemented in respect of the MRes degree, the BSc Veterinary Nursing (top-up) and the MSc Veterinary Education. It found that there was some initial confusion in the timings of the first stage of the process for the MRes. The validation reports indicated that there had been careful consideration of the academic content, but the way in which the learning opportunities would be supported was not clear to the team. Other than consideration as part of the business plan, this did not seem to be fully explored in the process. The team did note, however, that the proposed collaboration with Hong Kong Polytechnic University, admittedly in its very early stages, was being taken forward prudently, with care and due diligence.

98   A validation panel is a joint panel of the LTAC and TQC introducing a potential confusion, in responsibility and authority, between the two committees. The team discussed the operation of the course approval process with chairs and members of the LTAC and the TQC, and was advised that it seemed a natural role for the TQC also to be involved in the process. However, it seemed to the team that the respective role of each committee, where the LTAC assures the quality and standards, and the TQC monitors the implementation of the process, was not appreciated by all committee members or being fully operated.

99   Annual review reports and their action plans are considered by course management committees. They are presented to the TQC for approval. While annual review makes use of module reviews, feedback from module tutors, external examiner reports, student feedback and centrally produced statistics for the year, the audit team found that there was no

comparative, longitudinal analysis of data to enable course management committees or the TQC to evaluate trends or verify the attainment of learning opportunities. It seemed to the team that the lack of any overview or summary of the outcomes of annual reviews and actions meant that the TQC could not easily monitor the effectiveness of the process, or be assured of consistency in the management of the quality of learning opportunities across the College.

100   The audit team was able to read all the documentation for a (periodic) QQR and was provided with further samples of the two-day process and its enactment. However, as with annual review, there is no longitudinal analysis of academic management information.

101   From its examination of the QQR process, the audit team formed the view that the review documentation would have benefited from prior analysis and synthesis of the evidence, more use of statistical data, the identification of trends and more critical reflection to support the conduct of a fully reflective and evidence-based evaluation and assessment. There was no specific reference in the review reports to the objectives of the review or confirmation that they had been checked and satisfied. The team was not, therefore, able to verify the completeness of the process in ensuring the continuing quality of the learning opportunities.

102   The audit team also noted that it seems to have been the practice for the Chair of the TQC to chair QQRs. The TQC is also responsible for approving the review report. Given this, the audit team queried, without in any way questioning the integrity or competence of the individuals concerned, whether this practice might represent a possible conflict of interest and undermine the independence of the review process. While recognising that the College has a limited number of staff to draw on, the team's view was that it could be beneficial to consider appointing other members of staff, properly trained, as internal members (including as chairs) of review panels.

103   Overall, the audit team considered that the College's established procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes were operating robustly at the course level, albeit that the consistency and comprehensiveness of the reports could be improved, as the College has itself acknowledged. However, the failure to identify and reflect on the outcomes of annual monitoring at the institutional level means that an overview of College trends and actions does not emerge. The lack of analysis of a considerable amount of data and relevant academic management information is limiting the College's ability effectively to manage the quality of learning opportunities. The College is, therefore, advised to continue to prioritise and expedite the development of the integrated College-wide approach to the systematic collection, analysis, evaluation and use of management information at course and institutional level, and that as part of this approach, the College should move rapidly towards a consistent and regulated approach to the identification, dating, attribution and registration of all relevant documents (see also paragraphs 107 and 166). The College is also advised to review its programme monitoring and review processes to ensure that the effectiveness of their operation, including appropriate actions, is evaluated at institutional level (see also paragraphs 35 and 39).

104   The College may also wish to review the roles of the TQC and the LTAC in these processes. The College stated in its Application that the TQC should be less directly involved in the operation of quality assurance procedures and perform more of an auditing role. Because of the TQC's involvement in the validation and QQR processes, it seemed to the audit team that this is not happening. The College is therefore advised to clarify further the respective functions of Academic Board, the TQC and LTAC with regard to the strategic oversight of its arrangements for assuring the standard of awards and enhancing learning opportunities; and ensure that the members of these committees understand clearly their respective roles and responsibilities.

Management information - feedback from students

105   Student opinion is obtained each year through the National Student Survey (NSS) and internal quality assurance mechanisms. The College claims that feedback on individual modules, courses and the teaching of individual staff via questionnaires is a well-accepted part of its quality assurance and enhancement processes. The information obtained, along with feedback from new

graduates and employers, contributes to the annual course monitoring and QQR processes. These processes are followed for collaborative programmes with the additional reporting of outcomes to the partner. The RDC considers annual reports of research students' progress.

106   To avoid duplication, the College has replaced staff-student liaison committees with a system whereby academic matters are brought to course management committees, and non-academic matters are taken to the Campus Services Committee. There are also separate arrangements for providing feedback on library and learning resources and other student support facilities. These are reported to the Student Support Committee, which monitors student views on these facilities and makes relevant recommendations to Academic Board.

107   Feedback from students is thus routed to a number of committees. The audit team was able to observe how this information is used to support the ongoing development and enhancement of courses. The TQC's approach to the large volume of data available to it is to prioritise a number of significant issues for follow-up and action each year. It considered the Annual Report on Student Feedback 2007-08, for example. However, this report contained considerable raw data, with only a superficial, descriptive evaluation. This made effective analysis by TQC difficult. A similar situation arose with NSS data, leaving the audit team uncertain as to whether this was the most appropriate forum for a detailed consideration of such issues and how the responses of those examining the data would be translated into action. Members of the LTAC itself, who met with the audit team, confirmed the absence of a systematic approach to the analysis of data and the identification of College-wide issues.

108   The College acknowledged in its application that the system for supplying and integrating academic management information, and for responding to student issues, needed revision and that more use could be made of its virtual learning environment and the intranet. The audit team noted that developing the use of statistical information at course level in evaluating quality had been recommended in the 2003 QAA Institutional audit report, and was pleased to learn that an integrated management information system was now beginning to be used. This should facilitate the production of an institutional overview of trends and of the student experience. The team formed the view that the College does not yet possess a mature system for the evaluation and appropriate summarisation of feedback and academic management information. Against this background, the team advises that the College continues to prioritise and expedite the development of a comprehensive and efficient system for the collation, integration and evaluation of feedback and academic management information at course and College level, to support arrangements for assuring effectively the standards of awards and enhancing learning opportunities.

Role of students in quality assurance

109   Students are represented on all committees that consider matters of concern to the student body, either through direct election or via nomination by the Students' Union Society. These committees include the Council, the Safety Committee, Academic Board and its key committees and course management committees. Where relevant, representation covers both undergraduate and postgraduate students and different campuses. The Student President sits on the College Council and Academic Board, and also has a monthly meeting with the Principal. There are also termly meetings between the Principal, senior staff and student representatives.

110   Minutes of committees and views expressed by students who met with the audit team indicated a high level of student input to the various College quality assurance processes. For example, student representatives on course management committees provide a student input into the annual course review process, while QQR panels meet specifically with student groups. Responsibility for student involvement in quality assurance processes within collaborative arrangements rests with the lead partner, normally the College, for joint programmes. Student representatives receive training, provided jointly by the College and the Students' Union Society. This includes a detailed document describing the College's committee structure and formal processes, the nature of committee business and procedures, and expectations for student

involvement. Where committee attendance requires representatives to miss classes, they may claim a payment through the Academic Development Office.

111   The SWS acknowledged '…that the student body (via the Students' Union in particular) has gradually strengthened its influence on the decision and directions taken by the College beyond the boundaries of course management…'. It also reported that, in general, communication between students and the College was still improving, but that more could be done to keep the student body as a whole informed of the value and effects of their involvement. However, the students who met with the audit team confirmed enthusiastically that their views are heard. They also confirmed that they receive feedback at course level and see subsequent action taken by the College. The team, in their observation of committee meetings and consideration of review documentation, noted instances where student representatives were actively consulted.

112   Overall, the audit team found that students are consulted at all levels of the College's operation and management and that the student view is used effectively in managing the College's learning opportunities. It considered that the arrangements for ensuring that the student body is represented on key committees within the College, and for facilitating their attendance; the opportunities for the student voice to be heard and acted upon to the benefit of the College; the enhancement of the student experience; and the commitment of the student body to these arrangements, are all features of good practice.

Links between research and/or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

113   The College has a strong research ethos and the quality of its research is nationally and internationally recognised. The latest version of the College's Research Strategy aims to ensure that the outputs of research ultimately inform clinical veterinary and medical practice, thus underpinning and providing the practical/clinical experience necessary for teaching. This is also articulated in the LTA Strategy. All staff are expected to contribute actively to teaching and to demonstrate to students how research feeds into the knowledge base of the subject. Students also have the opportunity to develop their own research skills. The College ensures that all internal degree programmes include at least one individual student project in which students are engaged in relevant activities supervised by research-active staff, and is aiming to increase such opportunities through intercalated degrees and vacation studentships. At taught postgraduate level, research projects form a substantive element of the assessment of each programme. The large number of postgraduate research students is trained in a research environment, which the 2008 research assessment exercise acknowledged as being nationally and internationally recognised.

114   Taught degree students who met with the audit team were enthusiastic in their comments on the currency of the curriculum, as evidenced by up-to-date referencing and by their perception that staff are active researchers and practitioners who bring their experience to the classroom. This research-based influence on course content is tested by the inclusion of external representatives on approval and review panels (see paragraphs 30 to 33 and 38) and by external examiners (see paragraphs 41 to 56). Research degree students reported that the facilities and infrastructure provided for their research were excellent. The team saw evidence not only of subject-based research activities and results, but also that a number of academic staff at the College had studied relevant pedagogical literature and were able to advise other colleagues about current pedagogical matters in an authoritative manner.

115   On the basis of the evidence available, the audit team was satisfied that scholarship and research appropriately informs programme content.

Other modes of study

116   The College runs two postgraduate distance-learning courses, the PgDip and MSc in Veterinary Epidemiology and Public Health, and the PgDip and MSc in Livestock Health and Production. They are managed by the Graduate School within the College's general quality

assurance framework, supplemented by additional procedures for ensuring the quality of teaching materials. These include appointing authors external and internal to the College, providing guidance designed by external editors for authors, and external approval and verification of course content. Staff development is also provided.

117   The LTA Strategy states that the College '…will continue to develop the use of e-learning where this is the most appropriate educational approach…'. Measures designed to achieve this objective include encouraging interactivity, problem-based and self-directed learning and student production of learning materials. As well as supporting distance-learning courses, including providing tutor support, the Bloomsbury Learning Environment (BLE) is used to support courses taught on-campus, lifelong learning and a number of on-line Continuing Professional Development (e-CPD) courses for veterinarians in practice. The LIVE Centre also provides guidance to staff. Students who met with the audit team confirmed that the BLE was used as an interactive resource as well as an information source, and felt there was a good balance between physical and virtual provision, a view confirmed in the SWS. The use of podcasts has also been introduced for induction.

118   From the evidence available to it, including meetings with staff and students, the audit team concluded that the College was operating its distance-learning provision effectively. External members of College committees who met with the audit team complimented the College on its professionalism and forward-thinking approach.

Resources for learning

119   In its application, the College described a well-funded and responsive library service, which addresses student needs on both of its campuses. Students have both formal and informal opportunities to comment on the service and their views are addressed through appropriate operational changes. The College has an Information Strategy, which supports developments in teaching and learning, and underpins the provision of extensive computer facilities and services for students.

120   In the view of the College, its small size facilitates links between learning support services (IT, library, e-media, study skills), all of which are part of the same organisational unit, Academic Support and Development, and course planning, approval, monitoring and review. Academic Support and Development senior staff are members of committees with responsibility for these processes, which gives them an overview of the demands likely to be placed on the relevant services. These processes operate across both in-house and collaborative provision.

121   Students are supported in their use of library and IT facilities through induction and user-education programmes operated by the relevant services with on-line support for features such as Intranet, virtual learning environment, webmail and software applications. The BLE consortium has proved popular with students as an additional learning support.

122   The College continues to develop the facilities necessary for learning through investment in a range of refurbishment and new-build projects. Notable among these are the replacement of the Hawkshead clinical skills centre by the LIVE Centre in late 2006. The LIVE Centre is the flagship element of the College's independent veterinary education programme and a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). It aims to develop students' independent learning skills and equip them to be effective lifelong learners throughout their careers. The Centre is the result of a major capital investment, incorporating clinical skills laboratories and a communication skills suite. In addition, the clinical areas in the Queen Mother Hospital doubled in size in 2008.

123   The audit team formed the view that the College directs considerable effort and investment to the support of learning by the College, in a manner that ensures that students are appropriately equipped to undertake their studies. The team shares the College's confidence that, as its planning function develops, increasing integration between academic and resource planning will be realised.

Admissions policy

124   In its meeting with senior staff, the audit team learned that the College has an institutional admissions policy, which is disseminated through the web. This policy document received Academic Board approval during 2008 and set out a brief generalised framework for admissions to taught courses. Although it includes a statement of principles that are consonant with the relevant *Code of practice*, it did not offer guidance to selectors with respect to how such principles might be satisfied.

125   The extent to which the institutional Admissions Policy influenced practice became clearer to the audit team in its meeting with course leaders. Each course specifies typical entry qualifications and determines its own entry criteria, which are operated by designated admissions tutors under the general oversight of the Head of Admissions or the Head of the Graduate School, as appropriate. It was clear at this level that selection and admissions decisions are addressed conscientiously, with relevant training given to selectors and the inclusion, in some interview panels, of experts external to the College. In the case of courses where collaborative partner institutions are involved, it was confirmed that partner staff have the opportunity to see applications and contribute to selection decisions. In addition, postgraduate taught course applications are channelled through the Graduate School, which acts as a source of advice in relation to admissions.

126   Before the implementation of the College's committee review, a Student Selection Subcommittee had reported to a Teaching and Learning Committee. The policy role of this Subcommittee is now subsumed into the role of LTAC, with operational responsibility passing to course management committees. The level of recruitment to each course is set by the SMG in the context of funded numbers or the business plan for new provision. The SMG also reviews relevant legislation, to ensure continued compliance with its requirements. An Equality and Diversity Group, established by the SMG and chaired by the Director of Human Resources, oversees relevant matters, with student issues being represented through student membership of the Group.

127   The College has recognised that, because of its veterinary focus, it faces particular challenges with respect to achieving a balanced intake to its range of courses, which attract applicants across a wide range of qualification levels. In general, awareness among staff is raised by the requirement for them to complete a web-based equal opportunities course, and for admissions staff to be paired with experienced staff as part of their induction into the process.

128   According to its application, data available to the College suggested that its student admissions process does not discriminate against any particular groups; however, the College also recognises that, given the small numbers available for analysis firm conclusions are difficult to draw. The audit team was informed that the College was in the process of preparing attainment profiles of applicants and entrants, to provide course management committees with further evidence relevant to their admissions activity. This work had received special grant funding and was described as work in progress.

129   In addition to its Admissions Policy, the College also publishes a set of regulations relating to the assessment of prior learning and admission with advanced standing, applying to all taught courses. However, the regulations provided for the audit team were those in operation when the Student Selection Sub-committee was in existence and were in need of updating in line with the changes alluded to in paragraphs 70 and 75. Course regulations specify whether admission with advanced standing is permitted.

130   The audit team formed the view that the processes in place for the admission of students to the College are adequate and operate satisfactorily.

Student support

131   The College has, following its committee review, established a Student Support Committee, the purpose of which, is to develop and monitor student support. The Committee works within the context of the College's Student Support and Guidance Strategy and is charged with receiving annual reports in respect of: student accommodation; finance advice and hardship funds; counselling services; learning support; occupational health; disability services; careers service; service for international students; liaison with the Student Union Society (SUS) and the chaplaincy services. These reports give a clear indication of the range of services available to students. The Committee also receives student feedback in respect of these services and makes any necessary recommendations to Academic Board.

132   The attention given to student support is further illustrated by its presence in the College's LTA Strategy, both in its newly approved form and in its previous formulations, with current developments building on previously recognised strengths.

133   Students, in their SWS and in meetings with the audit team, were generally content with the support available to them from both departmental and central staff. They benefit from significant investment in support services. For example, the investment in the creation of the LIVE Centre has provided them with the opportunity to develop independent learning skills, an objective arising from the LTA Strategy. The LIVE Centre has two clinical skills laboratories and a communications skills suite, offering a safe environment for the development of relevant skills.

134   Initially, students are supported through structured induction sessions, separately targeted at undergraduate, postgraduate taught, and postgraduate research students, in which introductory study skills are embedded, together with diagnostic tests for those who wish to assess their current level of numeracy and/or IT skills.

135   Academic support for undergraduate students is mainly through contact with relevant teaching staff, including module leaders and course directors, with small-group teaching a feature of most provision. Students indicated that they are content with the availability and adequacy of such support. Students on placement are supported by a College placement coordinator and by mentors at each placement venue. Tutors at placements are introduced to the role and its requirements by the College.

136   Postgraduate taught students receive support from a diversity of staff, but particularly and formally from course director(s). Postgraduate research students receive academic support from their supervisors and through the annual appraisal process. Postgraduate research students impressed on the audit team the effectiveness of this support and confirmed that it aligned wholly with the commitments made by the College.

137   The College provides pastoral support for students from a combination of in-house and bought-in expertise. This is in addition to the primary support available through academic staff who are, according to students, approachable and available if needs arise. Formally, undergraduate students have senior tutors and pastoral tutors available to them. Postgraduate tutors are available on a departmental basis. Central, in-house and bought-in student support services are subject to student surveys, which are received by the Student Support Committee where issues are discussed. The evidence available to the audit team indicated that students were fully supportive of the services available to them and their effectiveness.

138   Postgraduate research students have both primary and secondary supervisors and appraisers who, if the need arises, can offer support additionally or alternatively to supervisors. These mechanisms of support are supplemented by those provided through the Graduate School. The School provides administrative support to students within the College and monitors the implementation of the College's postgraduate research student Code of Practice. It also supports the students' log and a full programme of skills training.

139   According to its Application, the College has developed personal development planning (PDP) as a key feature of its academic support provision. Having been introduced to first-year students in 2005 and rolled out to all undergraduate students in 2006, it expects that it will take time to be fully embedded, and to reflect appropriately the College's academic disciplines and the needs of its students. Feedback on PDP was reported by the College to have been mixed, but the College remains committed to its development as a key element in its strategy to support students' growth as reflective, self-critical lifelong learners.

140   The audit team formed the view that the academic and personal support available to students was appropriate across the full range of provision and was delivered effectively in an accessible and sensitive fashion.

Staff support (including staff development)

141   The College has a Human Resources Strategy, which incorporates its staff development policy. Both the strategy and the policy relate to the key objectives of the College's overall strategic plan. As part of the implementation of the policy, the College adopted the HEFCE People Management Self Assessment Tool in 2006.

142   These general commitments are underpinned by staff development opportunities arising from both in-house and external sources with the pattern of provision being informed by the skills needs identified at appraisals. That the pattern of provision is responsive to such needs is demonstrated by the level of interest exhibited by staff through their attendance. In addition, the alignment of provision to needs is further addressed through the membership of the Director of Human Resources on TQC.

143   The support for newly appointed staff begins with a three-stage induction process involving administrative, departmental and institutional elements. In support of their introduction into teaching and learning, new academic staff members are required to undertake an Higher Education Academy (HEA)-accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice offered by King's College London, which may be followed by in-house support and support offered by the King's College London Institute of Learning and Teaching. New academic staff must also undertake an in-house communication skills facilitation course.

144   Training for specific academic roles is often a requirement, for example, for membership of, and chairing boards of examiners, for admissions activity and for aspects of distance and e-learning. In addition, staff are encouraged to investigate new teaching and assessment approaches through association with the LIVE Centre, where specialist staff are able to provide support and advice. Staff also have the benefit of regular curriculum review away days, where views can be exchanged with colleagues and external experts. The College uses external input in its training and development workshops and its own staff are involved in a range of discipline-based, and more general national educational bodies. It was noted by the audit team that, in this regard, the College provides financial support for staff involved in membership of HEA.

145   There is an annual appraisal scheme for all staff. New staff are also assessed annually over three years in teaching, research and other contributions, as part of their probation. Confirmed staff are appraised by interview with the relevant head of department, during which future objectives and training needs are identified. Although previously operated as part of an informal 'buddy scheme', peer observation of teaching has recently been relaunched as a formal requirement, the output from which will, in future, be incorporated into the evidence base for probation, appraisal and promotion. The College signals the importance of teaching in the promotion process in a variety of ways, with student and peer feedback, documented achievement and performance at interview being key pieces of evidence considered in this context.

146   Support staff members are also subject to annual appraisal, with the outcomes in terms of the identification of developmental needs feeding into the professional development programme operated by the College. Some developmental activity is compulsory for those support staff involved in the direct support of students' learning. The College also supports the attendance of support staff at relevant external professional activities.

147   As a further signal of the importance the College attaches to the support of its staff in the area of teaching and learning, it has sponsored the James Bee Educator Scheme which, since 1992, has recognised and rewarded excellence in teaching and related areas, including pastoral care. The Scheme offers both project support and prizes, which can be either team or individually-based. Substantial monetary prizes for individuals and teams are available. Nominations, project submissions and adjudications are run along the lines of the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme. From 2006-07, the award of individual prizes has involved student representatives and staff in nominations and the senior management selection panel.

148   The College involves external experts in staff and educational development workshops and as consultants on particular matters. An example of the latter is the review by one external examiner of the effectiveness of the College's mechanisms for provision of feedback (formative assessment) to students, presented to TQC in November 2008. As an example of the involvement of externals in Committee activity, the external member of the TQC is a full member who produces an annual report, which is discussed by the Committee. The current incumbent, although not a vet, feels that their views are considered objectively as an evaluation of the Committee's work and approach to pedagogy.

Overview

149   The College is continuing to address and refine its approach to staff support and development, and has identified a small number of priority areas for consideration, including a formal CPD framework for established staff. The audit team formed the view that the College is serious in its commitment to the support and development of its staff, and the structures and policies in place, and the activity arising within and from them contribute positively to the development of the learning environment offered to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Introduction

150   The College stated in its Application that quality enhancement is integral to quality management processes and that its quality assurance processes are used as a means of stimulating continuous improvement, rather than simply as a means of confirming that provision satisfies threshold notions of quality and standards. In this respect, the College's approach to quality enhancement is intended to be 'embedded' rather than being the subject of a formal policy or a set of defined procedures. The audit team's observation of the work of course management committees suggests that this is the case in some, but not all, instances and that there may be further opportunities for the detection, dissemination and exploitation of good and innovative practice across the College.

151   The College identifies the following processes as adopting a self-critical approach, with follow-up action as a key element: course design and approval; annual monitoring and quinquennial course review (QQR); consideration of, and responses to student, graduate and employer feedback; the system for examining external examiner reports, and its processes for responding to the reports of external scrutiny. In addition, the College identifies the following projects as specific quality enhancement initiatives:

- the Lifelong Independent Veterinary Education (LIVE) Centre

- the James Bee Educator Scheme prizes

- staff development programmes for both academic and non-academic staff

- staff development workshops

- peer observation of teaching

- the 'mentor' scheme for all new staff

- curriculum review away days.

152   The audit team recognised the value of these initiatives in promoting the quality of educational provision across the College. However, from its discussions with staff, it also formed the view that there was some way to go in making all staff aware of the College's approach to enhancement and their explicit responsibilities in this area. Given this, the College may wish to manage actively the identification and exploitation of opportunities for enhancement, to ensure that its intention of making enhancement integral to its quality management processes is translated into action.

External examiners

153   Nominations for external examiners are carefully considered by the Teaching Quality Committee (TQC) with regard to College strategy, subject specialism and interest/expertise in pedagogical development. They are invited to make developmental comments at meetings of examination boards. The College appears to make use of these various opportunities for enhancement, even though it has no formally articulated mechanism for so doing. Observation of the TQC suggested that it is diligent in considering the adequacy of course team responses to external examiner reports. However, the audit team formed the view that this Committee could be more effective in its oversight of the annual report on external examining to the University of London. The external examiners' training day (see paragraphs 47 and 48) is used as an opportunity to discuss pedagogical developments within the College, and to make use of the views and wisdom of external examiners based on their experience elsewhere. Thus the day becomes an opportunity for enhancement, as well as training.

Management information (including feedback and NSS outcomes)

154   The TQC receives feedback from stakeholders in the form of questionnaire results for:

- student feedback on the teaching of individual staff

- student feedback on individual modules

- surveys of student satisfaction at the end of their course (or BVetMed phase)

- feedback from new graduates and BVetMed graduates in practice for three to five years

- feedback from employers.

155   These vehicles and other sources are intended to provide information to enable the College to enhance teaching and learning. The way in which this feedback is gathered and evaluated has been considered earlier (paragraphs 105 to 108).

Role of students in quality enhancement

156   Student representatives sit on most College committees. They receive training provided jointly by the College and the Students' Union Society. They also receive a handbook detailing

the College's committee structure and modus operandi, and explaining what is expected of them. Other opportunities for students to represent their views include written feedback questionnaires adapted for each course, and the formal discussions that take place in course management committees.

157   The audit team observed instances of course teams making direct, practical use of feedback from students, for example, with regard to: the quantity of assessed learning; the importance and utility of an online discussion board as a learning environment and as a vehicle for assessment; information on course fees given in course handbooks, and difficulties faced by resit students needing to present a portfolio for assessment.

Good practice

158   In its Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy, the College acknowledges that the dissemination of good and innovative practice in teaching and learning occurs primarily through informal contacts supplemented by team teaching, the module review process, and internal contributions to staff development workshops.

159   Staff from the LIVE Centre provide a reference point for pedagogical information and expertise. They advise other academic staff on, for example, assessment methods, and advise course designers and management teams on pedagogical aspects of e-learning.

160   The College's e-media unit and library assist in the development of electronic and paper-based resources for teaching and learning. The College has developed its virtual learning environment in association with the Bloomsbury Learning Environment (BLE) consortium, and extended its compass beyond the College to veterinarians in practice. The College's suite of electronic educational materials is available to its graduates, as well as to current students.

161   In addition to the work of the LIVE Centre and the e-media Unit, the audit team noted other examples of enhancement and the dissemination of good practice. These included, for example: the gradual and cautious roll-out to other courses of a common marking scheme, first developed and tested within the BSc Bioveterinary Sciences; the work of the Research Degrees Committee in encouraging Human Resources to include supervisor training as part of its strategy for the continuing professional development of staff, and the recognition at course level, in particular during QQR, of the enhancement of learning opportunities afforded by the College's decision to increase 'smart-desk' provision.

162   The College holds curriculum review away days for its staff on an annual or biennial basis. It reports that the following matters have been discussed with College-wide implications for the development of its teaching: generic skills, leading to the development of the Professional Studies module; communication skills, leading to changes in arrangements for oral examinations; assessment, leading to more diversity and reliability among assessment methods; formal teaching of communication skills and curricular integration. The purpose and format of these away days are currently under review.

Staff development and reward

163   The audit team saw evidence that a number of academic staff at the College had studied areas of the pedagogical literature in depth and were able to advise other colleagues about current pedagogical matters in an authoritative manner. Topics on which such advice and guidance were given included standard setting and the use of expert groups; 'blueprinting' and understanding the relative representational values of different types of assessment instruments; the use of e-learning, particularly for students on work placement, and the desirability of establishing question banks and practical aspects of their use.

Overview

164   The College makes extensive use of opportunities for enhancement and exploits the information and resources available to it. Such activity is intended by the College to be embedded in all aspects of its work and, indeed, this appears largely to be the case.

165   The audit team concluded, nevertheless, that instances of enhancement activity were occurring in the absence of a clear policy. Thus, a number of initiatives are listed in the LTA Strategy and there are oblique references to the responsibilities of major College committees regarding the oversight and dissemination of enhancement activities. There appears to be limited awareness on the part of staff of the enhancement potential of much of their work, however, and a lack of discourse related to the acknowledgement of enhancement opportunities at course level.

166   Given this, the audit team concluded that the College's approach to enhancement is reactive rather than proactive. To assist in the exploitation of enhancement opportunities, procedures for the collection, dissemination, integration and exploitation of feedback data and management information should be placed on a more consistent footing. When this has been achieved, it is likely that more effective and efficient use will be made of key information sources and College-wide enhancement activities will be better informed.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

The College's approach to managing its collaborative arrangements

167   The College defines the term collaborative provision '…to encompass any course the delivery of which involves a partnership, either formal of informal, with an organisation external to the College…'. This is a somewhat broader definition than that used in the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. In its application, the College stated that it does not currently engage in validation, franchising, accreditation or articulation arrangements. Given the College's definition, its collaborative activity involves a small number of arrangements summarised briefly as follows:

- A BSc in Veterinary Nursing, which is a collaboration with the College of Animal Welfare and Middlesex University. This is a joint degree awarded with the latter, for which the last student entry was 2007. Subsequent student entries have been to a University of London award, with the College of Animal Welfare remaining as a partner in its delivery. From the evidence available to the audit team, it appeared that this transition was operating appropriately, with the interests of students being addressed, and the current Foundation Degree in Veterinary Nursing (in partnership with College of Animal Welfare) forming the basis for the development of a full degree.

- A BSc in Veterinary Sciences (name now changed to BSc Bioveterinary Sciences) is a University of London degree in which final-year students are able to take option modules from the portfolio available at King's College London (KCL).

- An MSc in Veterinary Epidemiology, which is a University of London degree offered jointly with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). This course is made up of modules provided by both institutions under a single set of assessment regulations. A meeting with collaborative representatives confirmed that this is a jointly delivered degree of the University of London, a view that was corroborated by the degree certificate provided by the College, which named both institutions with equal prominence. Notwithstanding this, the team was informed variously that the award was exclusively that of the College, and that LSHTM issued an additional certificate attesting to the attendance of students at that institution. The team concluded that this illustrated potential confusion both within the institutions and for students who, along with others, might assume that two awards were being made for the same learning, a situation that should not persist. The audit team also noted that the Memorandum of Understanding between the two bodies indicated a joint

award, with the College responsible for the award, together with the provision for LSHTM to issue a diploma.

- An MSc in Wild Animal Biology and an MSc Wild Animal Health are both offered by the College, with collaborative input from staff of the Zoological Society of London.

Approval of collaborative arrangements

168   Documentation submitted by the College, and scrutinised by the audit team, confirmed that collaborative arrangements require the approval of Academic Board. Procedures for considering memoranda of cooperation, including the requirement for approval by the Board, are now set out in the College's QA Handbook. A meeting with representatives of collaborating institutions illustrated a shared knowledge of the process of approval required by the College, including the distinction between consideration and approval of a business case on the one hand, and academic approval on the other.

169   At the time of the audit, the College was in the early stages of a new venture with an institution in Hong Kong in the veterinary nursing area. This was being progressed with appropriate care having commenced with a letter of intent, followed by a due diligence visit to Hong Kong and the possibility of a joint award launch for September 2009. In the meantime, two non-award bearing pilot modules are to be made available in Hong Kong during the academic year 2008-09. There is an expectation that a formal proposal for approval will be presented to Academic Board during the latter part of the academic year 2008-09. The cautious approach to relationship building and piloting being adopted by the College in this case appeared to the audit team to be entirely appropriate. It was clear that the College was aware of, and in control of, the potential academic and reputational risks that surround such ventures. In general, the College appears to be fully aware of its responsibility for quality and standards in the area of collaborative activity. This is reflected in the existence of College-based course management committees and boards of examiners for the awards involved with membership, and joint course leaders being drawn from both the College and partner institutions.

170   The College's Application indicated that degrees that are offered jointly with other institutions have their own special arrangements. A formal memorandum of cooperation, approved by Academic Board, specifies clearly the responsibilities of each partner in respect of regulatory matters and other aspects of the course's management and delivery. Although some memoranda were still in draft at the time of the audit, those seen by the audit team confirmed their general nature to be as claimed. The memoranda seen by the team had been prepared over a period of time, so had evolved in line with more recent requirements and were more overtly designed to meet the expectations of the relevant section of the *Code of practice*.

171   The more recent memoranda covering the MSc in Wild Animal Biology and the MSc in Wild Animal Health make explicit the fact that the course management committee for these courses are within the College's academic management structure with two course directors, one from each institution. They specify that the College is responsible for student recruitment, selection and registration, regulations and discipline, and that course review will be through the College's quinquennial review (QQR) process overseen by the Teaching Quality Committee (TQC). Further the (joint) Course Director nomination is subject to approval by the College's Learning Teaching and Assessment Committee (LTAC). In addition, staff of the Zoological Society of London who lecture on, or who are module leaders on, these courses can be honorary staff of the College. The audit team noted, however, that the QQR set up by the College identified the need to update the existing agreement to meet the College's current requirements as a matter of urgency.

172   The process of bringing all collaborative arrangements into line with its stated requirements is one which the team believes should be addressed systematically by the College, so as to ensure that its register of collaborative activity is accurate and complete. In doing so, the opportunity could be taken to ensure that all memoranda address the principles set out in the

College's current documentation and the precepts contained in the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. The BSc Bioveterinary Sciences, for example, involving KCL (see paragraph 179) and which complies with the College's definition of such provision, is not listed.

Monitoring and review of collaborative arrangements

173   The annual review documents provided with respect to those courses that involved collaboration with other institutions illustrated that each course is dealt with as a whole and does not distinguish between the contributions made by the two institutions. This strengthened the view that a single course management committee with joint course directors encouraged an integrated view of such activities. This approach did not, however, appear to provide the College with sufficient assurance of the quality and standards of those specific parts of the course delivered by the collaborative partner as part of a College award. This potential lack of explicit and independent evaluation of evidence relating specifically to such inputs has been identified by the College as one of the outcomes of the BSc Bioveterinary Sciences QQR. Documentation available to the audit team indicated that membership of the relevant panel had been as prescribed by the College and was independent of the partner. The documentation considered by the panel was also seen to be in line with College procedure.

174   A meeting with representatives of collaborating institutions suggested that they recognise the mutual benefit for their respective institutions of involvement with the College and were generally aware of the agreements supporting these collaborations. The existence of two course directors for each collaborative arrangement was confirmed. Those to whom the audit team spoke demonstrated a clear understanding of the roles of each institution and of the individuals involved. There was, in addition, a clear recognition of the College's responsibility for award standards.

175   The meeting also illustrated the high levels of interaction between the relevant collaborating staff through course management committee membership and other more informal mechanisms. Although College staff confirmed that award standards were protected by the relevant course management committee, it was also clear to the audit team that statistical and other monitoring data/information is not synthesised effectively.

176   Examinations and assessments and the consideration of their outcomes as they relate to collaborative provision are clearly within the remit of an appropriate College board of examiners. Student cohorts in partner institutions are considered in exactly the same way as College-based students.

177   As members of course management committees, students have a direct input into the consideration of quality assurance documentation. Their membership of these committees, the TQC and Academic Board also provides them with the opportunity to see and comment on external examiner reports.

178   The QQR reports seen by the audit team indicated that learning resources in collaborating institutions could be addressed through this mechanism. Student handbooks, for example, follow the general pattern of those in use across the College, and students in partner institutions have full access to the support services of the College, in addition to those offered by their own institutions, although the issues facing part-time and dual-location students were occasionally of concern to students. The team concluded that students following courses in collaborating institutions were not compromised with respect to access to facilities and to support and guidance, which was at a level similar to that available to students following courses on the College's campuses. In general, although some minor issues of course management were raised, students on collaborative courses seen by the team were satisfied with their experience and particularly valued the unique nature of some of the provision available to them.

179   In the view of the audit team, the framework that the College has put in place with respect to collaborative provision is appropriate to the current range, scale and nature of this activity.

Monitoring and review of collaborative provision uses standard College procedures, including external examiners and, as such, deals with the courses involved in a holistic fashion. This is consistent with a partnership approach, but does not always allow the College to demonstrate explicitly its assurance of partner input. This is exemplified by the input of KCL's modules into the BSc Bioveterinary Sciences degree where, the report of the relevant QQR identifies the lack of independent assurance of the KCL contribution as a matter for further attention, and where less reliance might be placed on KCL's own quality assurance processes.

180   The assessments for the courses are all covered by College regulations and guidance documents. Examinations and assessments and the consideration of their outcomes as they relate to collaborative provision are clearly within the remit of a College board of examiners. Student cohorts in partner institutions are considered in exactly the same way as College-based students.

181   The documentation available to the team, including the details of the proceedings of course management committees, QQRs and annual monitoring reports, indicated that, in general, the provision covered by the College's definition of collaborative activity, is dealt with in the same way as provision that is exclusively delivered by the College, with key documentation having shared input from all relevant parties.

Overview

182   Having considered the procedures and requirements currently in place in the College in respect of its oversight of collaborative provision, the audit team concluded that, although progress has been made, the College is still seeking to respond to some aspects of the recommendations contained in the previous audit report dealing with collaborative provision. As it continues to respond to those recommendations, it would be advisable for the College to review its current definition of collaborative provision; to encompass more accurately the range of activities that involve external providers, and review its collaborative provision procedures to clarify the evidence required from its collaborative partners, to give the College assurance that the standards and quality of the provision are fully met.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Institutional arrangements and the research environment

183   The College has a strong research ethos and the quality of its research is recognised both nationally and internationally. The majority of academic staff are actively engaged in research (75 per cent were returned in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise) and participate nationally and internationally in the wider research culture. The College's principal research interests, overseen by a vice-principal and the Research Strategy Committee (RSC), fall into four major areas, divided into seven subgroups. These groupings meet on a regular basis and there is also a College-wide programme of regular research seminars. There is extensive collaboration with researchers in other colleges of the University of London, all of which makes for a strong research environment within which to train postgraduate research students.

184   The College participated in the HEFCE/QAA Review of research degree programmes in 2006. The judgement of that review was that '…the institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programme provision is appropriate and satisfactory…'. The aspects of assessment and the security of award standards considered by the audit team led it to the same conclusion as the Review, namely that '…institutional arrangements for the assessment of research students are appropriate and satisfactory…' (see also Section 2).

185   Research degrees are formally administered, examined and awarded by the University of London under the aegis of the College's RDC and the requirements of the University's Senate.

The Senate delegates certain responsibilities to the College, but monitors the College's quality assurance procedures and the outcomes of examinations and appeals. Using its delegated powers, the College specifies its own local regulations for the management and training of its research students. The College formulates its research degree framework in accordance with the FHEQ and *Code of practice* and also takes account of the requirements of other stakeholders, including HEFCE, the research councils and relevant professional bodies as appropriate. Academic responsibility for the quality and standard of the College's research degrees (PhD, DVetMed, MPhil), for the recommendation of strategy and for the oversight of the research degree environment, rests with the RDC.

186   The College's research degrees are administered and managed by the Graduate School. The Head of the Graduate School sits on the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, the Teaching Quality Committe, the RDC and the Research Strategy Committee. The Graduate School is responsible for the production of the College's postgraduate prospectus and application form; for the system of selection and appointment of students; for monitoring the postgraduate student 'life-cycle'; for the provision of a code of practice for postgraduate students; for training supervisors and ensuring best practice in research supervision; for the provision of a student log to record progress and training and the management of a skills training programme; for running the Postgraduate Academic Progress Committee; for conducting an annual feedback survey; and for administering the annual award of a prize for the best PhD student. Supervisors, other academic staff and administrative staff find the Graduate School to be robust and purposeful, and they value the support it provides at all levels of postgraduate research activity.

187   In its observation of committees and examination boards, the audit team noted the strong support and secure guidance on postgraduate matters provided by the Graduate School. It also noted the close attention paid at an administrative level to the progress and requirements of individual students. The team commends the leadership and administrative support provided by the Graduate School for all postgraduate students, as a feature of good practice.

Selection, admission, induction and supervision of research students

188   The College's postgraduate prospectus provides a comprehensive introduction to the College and its research groups, to the role of the Graduate School and to the type and manner of research training that a student might expect. Available places are advertised on the College website and elsewhere. The College has a standard procedure for interviewing prospective PhD students, and guidance on conduct, suitable questions and appointment criteria is given to those taking part in the process.

189   The availability of research projects is driven by the availability of grant funding, combined with institutional strategy and the personal research interests of members of staff. The RDC oversees the distribution of studentships, taking account of individual staff workloads and with a general principle that no individual should be the main supervisor for more than six students at any one time.

190   New students attend a two-day induction event which they reported as useful. It offers them a chance to meet other students and feel part of a postgraduate community. They already know who their supervisor will be and will probably have made contact before their arrival at the College. At this event, they are made aware of the central administrative role of the Graduate School.

191   Each research student has a supervisor and co-supervisor. Some may also have external supervisors, depending on the nature of the work or research arrangements. The specific roles and responsibilities of these individuals are not written down, although the adequacy and effectiveness of supervision are constantly monitored through the detailed monitoring of individual student progress. Probationary, and other staff new to supervision, receive mentoring support from more experienced colleagues as part of their overall training programme. The training needs of supervisors, and the inclusion of training within continuing professional development, are monitored by the RDC.

192   Students reported to the audit team that the facilities and infrastructure provided for their research were, in their view, excellent. They are each given a desk and computer for the duration of their studies. Library facilities were also reported to be excellent and the library responds rapidly to requests for new books or external resources. Support services, including those for career development, are regarded as excellent. Students felt that all facilities were equally shared throughout the College.

Progress and review arrangements

193   All students are expected to hold regular formal meetings with their supervisor throughout the year. Students are encouraged to monitor and reflect on their own progress through completion of a Student Log. This document includes a Learning Needs Analysis, designed to inform discussion between student and supervisor. The Log Book allows students to monitor their progress, record training events and record conferences and seminars attended. It also provides material for discussion at supervisory meetings. The Log Book, and how to use it are introduced to students during their induction.

194   All PhD students register initially for an MPhil and upgrade at the end of the first year, subject to successful appraisal and the presentation of a 500-word report. This appraisal involves the student's supervisor and co-supervisor and two other assessors, one of whom is unconnected with the research being undertaken.

195   All students receive an annual appraisal as part of the ongoing monitoring of their progress, which is also used to identify students in difficulty. It involves a written report, an interview and a subjective review of research progress, training and skill development. The annual appraisal form comprises five parts and allows for assessment by supervisors, by a departmental assessor and by non-departmental assessor, as well as facilitating the student's own reflective comments. The final component records the overall recommendation of an assessment panel. The appraisal interview includes consideration of the contents of the Log Book.

196   Appraisal reports are received by the Head of the Graduate School and the RDC. The progress of individual students is noted and those with potential support needs are identified. Appraisal reports are used, together with examiners' reports, completion statistics and the results of feedback surveys, as a means of monitoring overall research student progress and assessing the effectiveness and appropriateness of the provisions of the College's research training environment.

197   The audit team concluded that the research degree student monitoring and appraisal process is soundly constructed, securely organised and responsive to the needs of individual students.

Development of research and other skills

198   The Graduate School provides a comprehensive programme of training in generic research skills augmented by the College's Human Resources Department, which offers training in wider employability/career skills, funded by 'Roberts' money. The complete training programme is described in a comprehensive booklet entitled, the Research Student Training Programme, given annually to all students. Students also receive regular emails from the Graduate School about training opportunities.

199   All students are expected to attend a course on statistics. Other courses are optional, but there is strong encouragement to attend and students report that the courses are well suited to their needs. The Graduate School monitors the uptake of training courses. Students may also avail themselves of training opportunities offered by the Bloomsbury Group Training Network, based at University College London. There is a regular programme of research seminars, which students are expected to attend. These are often video-linked between the two College

campuses. Students are made aware of relevant research seminars being held at other colleges of the University, particularly within the Bloomsbury Group.

Feedback arrangements

200   All postgraduate students are members of the Postgraduate Society, which provides the main forum for discussion, as well as identifying representatives to sit on College committees. These representatives are the main route for making views known or for asking for action to be taken. Students reported to the audit team that they felt that their views are genuinely sought and listened to, and that they often see evidence of responses to matters that they have raised.

The assessment of research students

201   Research degree examiners are appointed by the University of London based on nominations made by the College to the Higher Degrees Advisory Committee (HDAC) of the Veterinary Subject Panel. The external examiner will be from outside the University, whereas the internal examiner will be from another college of the University or from the College itself depending on the specific expertise required. Nominations are scrutinised in detail by the Graduate School and submitted for confirmation by the RDC prior to submission to the HDAC. External examiner reports are currently considered by the Graduate School but in future will also go to the RDC for review.

Representations, complaints and appeals arrangements for research students

202   The annual appraisal interviews for research students and clinical training scholars are intended to provide an opportunity for them to give formal feedback on the quality of supervision they have received. They are also consulted on these matters through questionnaires, the results of which are considered by RDC and Academic Board.

Overview

203   The audit team was satisfied that the College's postgraduate research programme provision meets the expectations of the *Code of practice*. The team noted in particular the quality and depth of the supervision, monitoring, training and support provided for research degree students. The progress of individual students is carefully managed and students appear to be well supported in their studies. The team also noted the quality of leadership and administration provided by the Graduate School, in particular, by the attention given to identifying the most appropriate examiners prior to recommendation to the University of London.

Section 7: Published information

204   The undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses published annually are viewed as sources of clear and objective information for students rather than as marketing tools. They provide a comprehensive introduction to the College, student life and student support together with information about the programmes and methods of study. The postgraduate prospectus also includes details of the College's research groups, the role of the Graduate School and the type and manner of research training that a student may expect. Studentships and other research opportunities are advertised on the College website and elsewhere. The prospectuses and brochures, academic regulations and information about student life and student support are also available on the College website, which is maintained by the e-Media Unit. The text for published material and the website is drafted by staff in the Academic Support and Development Unit, in consultation with course directors, the heads of the Graduate School and Admissions and other colleagues, and is signed off for printing by the Education Liaison Manager.

205   The Academic Registry publishes information and instructions about the registration processes for undergraduate students, including posting details on the web site. Doctoral students receive individual letters about the process. Students who met with the audit team confirmed the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the prospectus and other pre-entry information, and indeed all the information given about the College and their programmes of study before, and on, arrival at the College. This view was confirmed in the Student written submission, which also referred to the frequent updates to course material.

206   The latest version of the College's memorandum of cooperation required for partnership with a collaborating institution makes it clear that the College's approval of external publicity relating to course of study, which can be developed jointly with the partner organisation, is required. The audit team was able to verify that this is being implemented.

207   The Academic Registrar is responsible for assuring the integrity of the statistical returns that underpin the externally published statistics about student data and teaching quality information. The College also makes external examiner reports accessible to all staff and students through its committee system.

208   The College has clear guidance for staff and students (available on its website) on information compliance, and since writing its Application has drafted a Disability Equality Scheme.

209   The audit team concluded that the College has implemented appropriate systems to ensure that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information it publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.