



London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

December 2012

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About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. The review took place on 3-6 December 2012 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Ian Duce
- Dr Andrew Rogers
- Mr Dan Derricott (student reviewer)
- Miss Samantha Coates (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
 - threshold academic standards¹
 - the quality of learning opportunities
 - the information provided about learning opportunities
 - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- identifies features of good practice
- makes recommendations
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take
- provides commentary on the theme topic.

A summary of the [key findings](#) can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

In reviewing the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The chosen [theme](#) is 'the experiences of international students entering UK higher education for the first time' – a variant of a national theme for 2012-13 looking at 'the first year student experience', considered by QAA to be appropriate for institutions with postgraduate students only.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.² Background information about London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine is given at the end of this report. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for [Institutional Review](#) of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland³ and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

¹ For an explanation of terms see the [Glossary](#) at the end of this report.

² www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus

³ www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/IRENI/Pages/default.aspx

Key findings

This section summarises the QAA review team's key findings about the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

QAA's judgements about the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

- Academic standards at the School **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the School **meets UK expectations**.
- The quality of the information produced by the School about its learning opportunities **meets UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the School **meets UK expectations**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

- All grades of academic staff are required by the School to undertake teaching which enables its world-class research activity to inform and enhance student learning (paragraph 2.1.1).
- There is a comprehensive framework of staff development programmes related to the development of teaching practice (paragraph 2.1.2).
- The approach to staff development allows staff undertaking new roles to work with and learn from more experienced colleagues (paragraph 2.1.3).
- There is a comprehensive and systematic approach to collecting and responding to student feedback (paragraph 2.3.2).
- The rich diversity of the student body feeds into the peer support networks; these are encouraged and facilitated by the School both in face-to-face and distance-learning provision (paragraph 2.2.5).
- Programme specifications are used to inform the public and the School's staff and student community as well as in quality assurance processes (paragraph 1.1.3).
- There is a close relationship between face-to-face and distance-learning programmes and the student learning opportunities for both modes of delivery are equitable (paragraph 2.12.3).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

By the start of the academic year 2013-14 the School should:

- satisfy itself that ultimate responsibility for all of its quality assurance processes is clearly identified (paragraphs 1.2.3, 1.4.2, 2.1.4 and 3.1.2).
- introduce more systematic and effective support for student representatives at all levels to enable them to understand and fulfil their duties (paragraph 2.3.4).

- ensure that the voice of research degree students in the School is heard more effectively at the institutional level (paragraph 2.3.5).
- introduce an effective institutional mechanism to monitor the formal meetings between all research degree students and their supervisors (paragraph 2.10.4).

By the end of June 2013 for existing partnerships and before the recruitment of any students onto collaborative programmes for new partnerships, the School should:

- ensure that all existing collaborative partnerships have up-to-date and detailed memoranda of agreement in place, and that a policy (which incorporates a clearer articulation of due diligence processes) in line with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education is in place for the development of all new partnerships (paragraph 2.11.4).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The School is continuing to implement its online application system to improve the efficiency of applications to the institution and, where applicable, the process of applying for a visa to the UK Border Agency (paragraph 2.5.2).
- There is a continued focus on enhancing the quality and timeliness of pre-registration information (paragraph 2.5.4).
- A new complaints and appeals policy is being introduced, alongside actions to increase awareness and transparency (paragraph 2.6.3).

The experiences of international students entering UK higher education for the first time

The review team investigated the experiences of international students entering UK higher education for the first time at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. A large proportion of the School's student population is international. The needs of international students are met through an inclusive approach taken by the School which ensures full integration with its support structures.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the operational description and handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/IRENI/Pages/default.aspx).⁴

⁴ www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/IRENI/Pages/default.aspx.

About the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine is a world-leading centre for research and postgraduate education in public and global health. Its mission is 'To improve health and health equity in the UK and worldwide; working in partnership to achieve excellence in public and global health research, education and translation of knowledge into policy and practice'.

The School is a specialist institution with many unique features. Key features include: research intensity, international reach and a leading global position in its fields of work. Educational provision is wholly postgraduate, with around 4,000 students in total registered in any given year. Provision covers face-to-face and distance-learning Master's-level courses, research degrees and short courses. As part of the University of London, the School awards University of London degrees. It possesses (but does not exercise) its own taught and research degree-awarding powers. Distance-learning courses are run as part of the University of London International Programmes ('the International Programmes'), in a collaborative enterprise with the University of London International Academy.

Noteworthy developments since the School's last QAA Institutional Audit in 2007 include:

- the opening of major new building developments, the South Courtyard of the School's main Keppel Street building (2009), and a new site at Tavistock Place (2010)
- the appointment of Professor Baron Peter Piot as Director of the School in 2010, succeeding Professor Sir Andy Haines
- the conversion of the School's face-to-face and distance-learning Master's-level courses to a credit framework system in 2011-12
- the implementation of a new dual registration scheme, under which distance learners are registered as students of the School as well as with the International Programmes, from 2010-11.

Important challenges currently facing the School include:

- implementing strategy and achieving success in the face of a global economic downturn and particular financial pressures on UK higher education, including the unknown consequences of the changes to UK undergraduate funding arrangements for postgraduate participation
- strengthening organisational functions and services to ensure they are fit for the growing size and scope of the School's activities
- growing competition from other institutions internationally
- changing trends in student learning including international mobility and immigration rules, demand for more flexible and diverse modes of study (for example online learning, study while employed), and financial pressures including fees, living costs and job scarcity
- enhancing teaching and learning provision in line with the new education strategy which includes growing student numbers, combining flexibility and excellence, and developing new partnerships and courses using diverse modes of delivery and technological tools.

With regard to collaborative provision, the School's distance-learning programmes are a collaborative enterprise within the University of London International Programmes. Otherwise, the School's most significant collaborative courses are the three joint Masters courses with other University of London colleges.

The School has not traditionally collaborated beyond the University of London in delivering formal courses and awards. However, it is anticipated that this may change as a result of the School's new five-year strategy for 2012-17. The School will consider any future proposals for such provision carefully and strategically before agreeing them.

Other collaborative activities include the following.

- The Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene which is an award of the Royal College of Physicians, for which students register and are taught via the School but are examined by the Royal College of Physicians. School staff are also heavily involved in examination processes for the Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene.
- The East African Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene which was founded in 2011, as a sister course to the London-based Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene. The Royal College of Physicians is not involved as the programme is based outside the UK. It is solely an award made by the School, but has a strong collaborative element - involving formal input from four other partners, Johns Hopkins University (USA), Kilimanjaro Christian Medical University College (Tanzania), Makerere University (Uganda) and the University of Washington (USA).

Explanation of the findings about the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.⁵

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#)⁶ is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.⁷

1 Academic standards

Outcome

The academic standards at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 Each qualification (including those awarded under collaborative arrangements) is allocated to the appropriate level on the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* (FHEQ).

1.1.1 The School makes awards of the University of London. It has its own regulations within the University of London framework. One of the School's programmes (the Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene) is awarded by the Royal College of Physicians.

1.1.2 Programme specifications for London-based courses and distance-learning programmes show alignment with the FHEQ. Programme specifications for other programmes are readily available on the website for all courses. The School's quality assurance and enhancement code of practice explicitly identifies appropriate external reference points.

1.1.3 Current programme specifications are well-structured, informative and clearly demonstrate alignment to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). The School uses them as key documents for public information, as a resource for students, and as a driver for ensuring staff awareness of the relationships between learning outcomes and assessments. They present key information in an accessible format. The use of programme specifications in informing the public and the School's staff and student community, as well as their use in quality assurance processes, is a **feature of good practice**.

1.1.4 Programmes and modules are designed in accordance with guidelines defined in the School's Course and Module Design Code of Practice, which establishes the principles for defining the volume of work in terms of notional learning hours and provides guidance for alignment with FHEQ qualification descriptors. Outcomes of programme review and external examiners' comments confirm appropriate alignment and demonstrate that outcomes of programmes match qualification descriptors.

⁵ The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However, it is available on request for inspection. Please contact QAA Reviews Group.

⁶ www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.

⁷ See note 4.

1.1.5 The School has recently implemented a credit framework for all of its Masters programmes. This work has consolidated the consistency of FHEQ alignment; however, the process is ongoing with regards to accreditation of prior learning and award-bearing short courses.

1.1.6 Research degrees are aligned appropriately with the FHEQ and this is explicit in programme specifications.

Use of external examiners

1.2 The School makes scrupulous use of external examiners.

1.2.1 The School exercises authority for the appointment and definition of duties for external examiners for face-to-face programmes. Procedures and functions of external examiners are comprehensively defined in the Exam Board Handbook.

1.2.2 Authority for defining the role of external examiners for distance-learning courses and for their appointment lies with the International Programmes. As a lead college for these programmes, the School operates within the broad framework set out by the International Programmes. Once external examiners have been appointed, their role in distance-learning programmes operates in the same way as for the School's London-based programmes and follows the procedures in the Exam Board Handbook. However, the reports are returned in a slightly different format via the International Programmes. The division of responsibility for oversight of the function of external examiners between the School and the International Programmes is effectively managed.

1.2.3 Nomination of external examiners for both distance-learning and face-to-face courses is made by the School although letters of appointment for the former are issued by the International Programmes. Responsibility for induction and training for external examiners lies with the Chair of each examination board. The School may wish to establish a process to assure itself that the induction of new external examiners has taken place. The external examiners' report template also requires external examiners to acknowledge whether they are satisfied with the materials and support provided to them, and to comment on any issues.

1.2.4 External examiners are assigned to a particular examination board which has responsibility for one or more awards and is also responsible for oversight of particular modules. The identity and affiliation of external examiners is made clear to students by inclusion in the programme specification published on the School website.

1.2.5 External examiners' reports are submitted on a comprehensive pro-forma specifically requiring externals to establish that standards set are appropriate. It is clear that external examiners express confidence in the standards of awards. External examiner reports for face-to-face and distance-learning courses both provide a comprehensive appraisal of the awards and the examination process.

1.2.6 External examiner reports are posted on the School website alongside the examination board and course committee reports and a summary report from the previous academic year. This gives students a comprehensive view of external examiners' recommendations and School action points. Students are also represented on course committees which discuss the reports. The School's approach to sharing external examiners' reports with students is in accordance with HEFCE 2006/45.

1.2.7 The annual monitoring process includes a comprehensive mechanism for considering external examiners' reports and action plans. School oversight of the process operates at Faculty level where Taught Course Directors sign off reports, and at the Quality

and Standards Committee (QSC) where a summary of themes is compiled, discussed and fed back to programme level before being made publicly available on the website.

1.2.8 Comments and actions ensuing from reports are fed back to external examiners by Examination Board Chairs and Course Directors via the School for face-to-face programmes or the International Programmes for distance-learning programmes. The School monitors and comments on late reports from course and examination teams.

1.2.9 There is a clearly articulated process by which external examiners can raise concerns. No such concerns have been raised in at least the last 10 years.

Assessment and standards

1.3 The design, approval, monitoring and review of assessment strategies is effective in ensuring that students have the opportunity to demonstrate the learning outcomes of the award.

1.3.1 A set of objectives is articulated in the School's Assessment Handbook which explains the role of assessment in relation to attainment of learning outcomes. The relationship of learning outcomes and assessment is apparent in programme and module specifications, and extensive advice on design is provided in the School's Course and Module Design Code of Practice and in the Assessment Handbook. Staff are aware of the role of assessment in enabling students to achieve learning outcomes, and external examiners regard the assessment strategy as appropriate. The relationship between assessment and learning outcomes has recently been revisited during the application of a new credit framework to the taught courses.

1.3.2 Procedures for the operation of examination boards are clearly defined in the Exam Board Handbook for taught courses and for research degrees in the Research Degrees Handbook. These structures operate effectively, and cross-representation between examination boards helps to maintain consistency between awards including between face-to-face and distance learning.

1.3.3 The conduct of assessment and the processes which support the assurance of award standards are clearly articulated and include significant recent work on a revision of the extenuating circumstances policy.

1.3.4 Principles governing the amount and timing of assessment are specified in the Course and Module Design Code of Practice. Some changes to the current arrangements have been introduced during implementation of the new credit framework and future changes are being considered. The volume and timing of assessments is appropriate.

1.3.5 The grading scale employed by the School, and the principles for combining marks, moderation of marks, and so on are defined in the assessment handbooks as are the requirements for obtaining credits. Module Organisers have delegated authority to set module assessment tasks and criteria. Examination boards set programme level exam papers and criteria for MSc projects. All summative assessments are double-blind marked and marks reconciled where necessary.

1.3.6 Staff receive written guidance on mechanisms to provide feedback to students and the use of a pro-forma is recommended. Timeliness and quality of feedback is checked by Faculty Taught Course Directors. Both face-to-face and distance-learning students were satisfied with feedback on formative and coursework assignments. Feedback on examination assessments is not provided individually. Generic feedback on exams from examiners' reports is available but is less useful to students.

1.3.7 Staff are provided with training on assessment as part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching, and there is a strong culture of mentoring where new teachers are paired with more experienced colleagues to undertake assessment tasks.

1.3.8 A recent accreditation report from the Agency for Public Health Education Accreditation in the European Region (APHEA) identified the possibility for students on the MSc in Public Health by distance learning to take additional taught modules as an alternative to a project. This is also applicable to two of the School's other distance-learning MScs. The School is considering whether the absence of a project from an MSc programme is appropriate.

1.3.9 Clear advice to students on academic misconduct is presented in handbooks and there is support and guidance to minimise the likelihood of students committing offences such as plagiarism.

1.3.10 The School has detailed and comprehensive regulations and procedures for the recording and documentation of assessment outcomes. Condensed versions of the main features are present in course handbooks for face-to-face and distance-learning programmes. The Research Degrees Handbook defines regulations for research degrees and also defines the expected standards and the mechanisms by which they are assessed.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.4 The design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes enable standards to be set and maintained and allow students to demonstrate the learning outcomes of the award.

1.4.1 Overall authority for the approval of new courses lies with Senate for the academic aspects of the programmes and the School's Planning and Finance Committee for financial oversight. New courses require scrutiny and approval on behalf of both.

1.4.2 The constitution and terms of reference of new programme validation panels are laid out in the Course Approval and Review regulations. The School plans to modify these regulations to ensure an external representative is always included in future validation panels.

1.4.3 Clear principles are laid down for the design and approval of new programmes and modules which have been recently updated.

1.4.4 The School operates a process of extremely well-articulated annual course review whereby external examiners' reports, comments and action plans from examination board Chairs and Course Directors are compiled using comprehensive standard forms. Students input into the process and can see action resulting from their input. These reports for all taught programmes, including award-bearing short courses, are presented together alongside programme specifications on the same webpage. Summary reports across programmes are also available on the same site. The process for distance-learning programmes routed through the International Programmes parallels the processes at the School and reports appear alongside those for face-to-face programmes.

1.4.5 Monitoring of modules also takes place annually and summary reports are compiled at Faculty level, recording that the process has occurred and drawing out themes. Oversight of the process and responsibility for considering summary reports on annual monitoring lies with QSC who publish an overview summary report on the School's website.

1.4.6 Periodic review of programmes is set by QSC, is approximately quinquennial, and incorporates external input from appropriate subject experts. It aims to validate the current quality and standards of courses and makes recommendations for future enhancement.

The process has recently been enhanced: evidence is now compiled into a detailed and highly reflective programme self-evaluation document. Outcomes of the review are published alongside other programme review documents (see paragraphs 1.4.4-1.4.5). Reports and action plans are considered by QSC.

1.4.7 The Research Degrees Committee (RDC) is responsible for ensuring the security of the standards of the School's research degrees and it reports via the Senate Executive Group to Senate. Faculty Research Degrees Committees, chaired by Faculty Research Degrees Directors, provide the main discussion forum for research degree issues and communication with the School RDC is ensured by Faculty Research Degrees Directors sitting on that committee.

Subject benchmarks

1.5 No QAA subject benchmark statements adequately cover the programmes offered by the School. However, the School uses a range of external reference points including UK and European agencies and professional bodies, external representatives at periodic review and research degree external examiners. Three MSc programmes in Public Health were recently accredited by the European Agency for Public Health Education Accreditation. A small number of criteria were not fully met and the School is working to address these areas.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 Professional standards for teaching and support of learning are upheld at the School.

2.1.1 The School is a world-class research institution which has also successfully embedded a framework for assuring and developing quality teaching across Faculties. Promotion criteria and career maps have teaching tracks, in addition to regular routes. This includes a comprehensive requirement that all grades of academic staff undertake teaching which enables its world class research activity to inform and enhance student learning, and is a **feature of good practice**.

2.1.2 The School runs a comprehensive staff development programme, largely centred on the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching which is accredited by the Higher Education Academy and aligns with the UK Professional Standards Framework. The first module is compulsory for probationary lecturers, and other staff are encouraged to complete it. Those new to teaching are also strongly advised to complete the second module although there are no wider completion targets for this or any other elements of teacher education. Additionally there is tailored training offered to Distance Learning tutors and those who supervise projects remotely. The comprehensive framework of staff development programmes related to the development of teaching practice is a **feature of good practice**.

2.1.3 Staff who take on additional roles such as Module Organiser are supported by sharing the role with a more experienced colleague or colleagues. This allows for a period of transition and induction and is an effective method of staff development. Career progression routes reward staff for taking on course management responsibilities. This approach to staff

development, which allows staff undertaking new roles to work with and learn from more experienced colleagues, is a **feature of good practice**.

2.1.4 Although the School intends no disparity, access to support for teaching can vary between research degree students who hold a staff contract with the School and those who do not. The School may find it helpful to implement an institution-wide mechanism for ensuring all research degree students involved in teaching or supporting teaching know of, and have access to, the relevant staff development support.

Learning resources

2.2 Learning resources are appropriate to allow students to achieve the learning outcomes of their programmes.

2.2.1 Programmes are well-delivered and supported and there is continued development through the framework for developing teaching. Students are satisfied with the quality of the programmes offered by the School. The 'open door' culture, which gives students access to the knowledge and expertise of the academic staff, is appreciated.

2.2.2 There is no overall strategy for deploying, developing or prioritising investment in physical or virtual learning resources. The Information Services Advisory Group has so far largely focussed on advising downwards to individual departments rather than taking a strategic and integrated approach to advising School bodies on the enhancement of learning resources.

2.2.3 The most recent survey of research degree students showed a fall in satisfaction with facilities and resources year-on-year. Concerns focus on the lack of private quiet space, such as for conference calls, but generally the School is making the best use of limited space in central London, including the opening of a new building which brings many research students physically closer to their departments.

2.2.4 There is a notable shift towards electronic learning resources, particularly for distance-learning students. While there are some good uses of electronic resources and online platforms which encourage interaction between new cohorts, students expressed discontent at the complexity of accessing them through multiple sites which required multiple logins.

2.2.5 One of the richest sources of support is the peer-to-peer support networks among students which are encouraged by staff early on in the student life-cycle. These allow students to develop contextual knowledge and understand real-life case studies from numerous countries around the world in addition to the core content of their study or research. The rich diversity of the student body which feeds into the peer support networks, and which is encouraged and facilitated by the School in both face-to-face and distance-learning provision, is a **feature of good practice**.

Student voice

2.3 There is an effective contribution of students to quality assurance.

2.3.1 The School has an entirely postgraduate student body which is typically either engaged in an intensive one-year MSc programme, heavily engaged in research towards a PhD or DrPH, or studying alongside employment. This presents a number of challenges for engaging students in quality assurance and enhancement.

2.3.2 The difficulties in face-to-face engagement have been recognised. Student surveys are, therefore, conducted electronically. There is a comprehensive framework of surveys at

all levels of provision and the approach is set out in the School's Student Feedback Code of Practice. The surveys are analysed and reported on primarily at course and faculty levels, including through annual monitoring and periodic reviews. At School level institutional committees such as QSC, Learning and Teaching Committee and RDC all consider student surveys to some extent. QSC also scrutinises and/or approves feedback and analysis from student surveys (including follow-up on action plans) in relation to the academic quality of the student experience and standards of its programmes and awards. The comprehensive and systematic approach to collecting and responding to student feedback is a **feature of good practice**.

2.3.3 Although students sit on most committees, their engagement in the School's decision-making bodies is a particular challenge. This has resulted in varying attendance and quality of engagement with various committees.

2.3.4 The current support for student representatives is limited to help from individual members of staff such as committee chairs, administrators or the Dean of Studies rather than there being anything systematic or formalised in place. It is **recommended** that the School introduce more systematic and effective support for student representatives at all levels to enable them to understand and fulfil their duties.

2.3.5 The Student Representative Council (SRC) is predominantly centred on face-to-face MSc students. There is also a greater sense of lack of coordination or leadership among research degree student representatives. Senior managers in the School recognise the challenge of encouraging coordination and leadership for research degree student representation. Currently the SRC is the primary vehicle for student representation and representatives for School-level decision-making bodies are drawn from it; this is not an effective means for ensuring that research degree students are represented on institutional-level decision-making bodies. It is **recommended** that the School work with research degree students to ensure that their voice is heard more effectively at institutional level.

Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.4 There is effective use of management information to safeguard quality and standards and to promote enhancement of student learning opportunities.

2.4.1 The School has made progress in recent years in collecting management information in various areas. The data is considered by QSC, although the School could still make fuller use of the information they now have available to inform policy. For example, there is an increased quality and quantity of data now being received from the International Programmes about its distance-learning provision. The new appointment of an Assistant Registrar with a remit for handling data is seen by the School as an opportunity for it to become more effective at collecting information and using it to inform policy and practice at institutional level.

2.4.2 The School makes good use of information deriving from student surveys. The framework for collecting, analysing and responding to survey data both locally within faculties and centrally within committees and services is comprehensive and well embedded (see paragraph 2.3.2).

2.4.3 In some areas the School does not monitor information because of the small numbers involved. Similarly it does not have many formal complaints due to its focus on informal resolution. However, it does not capture the number or nature of informal complaints which might provide useful information to inform quality enhancement.

Admission to the School

2.5 Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

2.5.1 There are clearly articulated arrangements in place concerning admissions. The regulations for all programmes give broad outline criteria for entry requirements, admissions status and registration. Central support departments and faculty staff are clear and efficient when progressing applications, which are turned around quickly. Generally any obstacles in the process are related to UK Border Agency (UKBA) immigration requirements, though support from the School in this respect is helpful.

2.5.2 There is a migration to an online applications system in this academic year; the continued implementation of the School's online application system to improve the efficiency of applications to the institution and, where applicable, the process of applying for a visa to the UKBA **is affirmed**.

2.5.3 While there is no publicised closing date for MSc applications, in reality there is a cut-off date which is often dependent upon the country of origin of individual students and the associated complexity of applying and registering. Staff handle applications submitted closer to the start of term individually to judge the likely impact of missing the start of term and will make a decision to either admit or defer the student.

2.5.4 The timeliness of receiving pre-enrolment information has been an issue for students and while there is a notable improvement, there is still some progress to be made especially with timetables. The continued focus on enhancing the quality and timeliness of pre-registration information **is affirmed**.

Complaints and appeals

2.6 There are effective complaints and appeals procedures.

2.6.1 The School has a student complaints procedure which sets out a number of steps for formal resolution. This is governed by an overarching principle that informal resolution should be sought first through student representatives, tutors or senior staff within the department. There are separate appeals procedures for assessment outcomes.

2.6.2 The size and culture of the School allows for a more personal and informal approach to be effective in resolving complaints. However, there is little awareness among staff or students of the formal procedure which acts as a safety net in the absence of satisfactory informal resolution, and there is no recording or monitoring of the number or nature of informal complaints to inform enhancement.

2.6.3 The student complaints procedure was last updated in June 1999. The School recognises this is now out-of-date and has embarked upon the development of a refreshed policy. This is an opportunity to embed and raise awareness of the formal procedure as a safety net for students should they have serious concerns about the standards or quality of their programmes. The School also intends to update appeals mechanisms as part of this. The introduction of the new complaints and appeals policy alongside actions to increase awareness and transparency **is affirmed**.

Career advice and guidance

2.7 There is an approach to career education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) that is adequately quality assured.

2.7.1 Careers information, advice and guidance are provided to students by C2 Education on behalf of the School. C2 Education is a University of London service that supports multiple colleges. C2 Education staff are deployed at the School as Careers Advisers, and work closely with the Head of Registry Services to offer tailored and relevant support. This allows the School to retain institutional oversight and direction of its CEIAG.

2.7.2 On the whole, students are aware of the support available. However, as the student body is entirely postgraduate and often pursuing a niche career or already within a career, the subject expertise and knowledge of staff is often valued more.

2.7.3 SRC highlighted CEIAG as an area that it would like to work with the School to develop this year, which corresponds well with the School's intention to develop a careers and employability strategy in 2012-13.

Supporting disabled students

2.8 The quality of learning opportunities is managed to enable the entitlements of disabled students to be met.

2.8.1 The School has a well-developed strategic approach to disability that addresses the needs of disabled students. Distance-learning student needs are managed by the International Programmes. The design of distance-learning material reflects the needs of disabled students. The needs of disabled students on face-to-face provision are managed by the School. Although both institutions have in place their own policies and committee structure, each also has arrangements that secure institutional oversight.

2.8.2 The establishment of a new Equality Scheme and committee structure will merge the governance arrangements for various minority groups into one. The Equality Scheme will be monitored by the Equal Opportunities Committee.

2.8.3 Disability data pertaining to disabled students is not routinely analysed as part of standard management information due to their very small number.

2.8.4 The School offers Equality and Diversity awareness training which is compulsory for all staff. Disability Awareness training is also offered by the University of London and may be accessed by School staff.

2.8.5 Students are expected to disclose the nature of their disability as part of the application process. Written assignments undertaken by students early in the academic year can serve to identify potential problems in respect of dyslexia. Processes are in place for academics to refer undiagnosed students for professional assessment.

2.8.6 Additional support is available to disabled students through the Student Adviser (Welfare and Disability) who also communicates with academics to ensure that the needs of disabled students are addressed in respect of learning opportunities and assessment. There is a wide range of support services available to students who require them. Disabled students feel very well supported by the School and expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their experience.

2.8.7 The School acknowledges that the information for disabled students on their website is not extensive. The School is in the process of migrating additional information on to their site, to enable both prospective and current students to be more aware of the services on offer and of the processes that need to be followed.

Supporting international students

2.9 The quality of learning opportunities for international students is appropriate.

2.9.1 International students constitute a large proportion of the student body. The School has taken an integrative approach. This is both appropriate and effective. The School invests considerable effort into ensuring that there is adequate support for its international students. The School maintains student characteristics data that confirms its global attraction for students.

2.9.2 Both students and staff cite the diversity of student origin as being an important factor contributing to the richness of the student experience (see paragraph 2.2.5).

2.9.3 International students are well supported during their application process, although recent changes affecting the visa process have led to students experiencing difficulty. The School has responded well to this, although not every student has been properly advised. Early availability of timetables is of great importance to students (see paragraph 2.5.4).

2.9.4 Attempts are made to integrate international students by means of induction programmes. The School has also deliberately incorporated group learning methods early into the delivery of programmes to facilitate social and academic integration. This activity is evaluated positively by students. Pre-sessional programmes are available and are used by students to augment language fluency.

2.9.5 The School has invested significantly in the development of a range of handbooks which are written in a style which is comprehensible to international students. Students acknowledge the work of the School in supporting them during the course of their studies. This has included the School adapting its assessment strategy in response to international students' previous experiences of unseen and time-constrained examinations.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.10 Appropriate support and guidance is provided to enable postgraduate research students to complete their programmes and to enable staff involved in research programmes to fulfil their responsibilities.

2.10.1 The School offers excellent opportunities for its research students. Overall, there are clear, comprehensive and well-distributed governance arrangements in place for research students. Regulations establish policy and procedures, which are supported by the development of other documents, such as the Supervisors' Handbook. There is a clear alignment with the Quality Code. Faculty Research Degrees Directors oversee relevant activity within their Faculty.

2.10.2 The School supports postgraduate research students in their initial application and in recent times has had to focus much of this work upon advising students in relation to their visas. Every effort is made to integrate research students into the wider student population.

2.10.3 Students are allocated supervisors in a timely manner. New supervisors are paired with more experienced colleagues to assist and support them in their new role (see paragraph 2.1.3). Supervisor training is also offered to support the acquisition of research supervisory skills.

2.10.4 Although minimum requirements for supervisory meetings are set out in the Research Degrees Handbook, the awareness of their existence is variable across the School. The monitoring of supervisory meetings is achieved through the use of a log. Recently, a requirement (for UKBA attendance monitoring purposes) has been introduced

for staff and students to email the Registry confirming that key supervisory meetings have taken place. Departmental Research Degrees Coordinators also meet with students at staged points to discuss progress. There is, however, no clear mechanism in place to reassure the institution that the minimum requirement for supervisory meetings is being monitored in a systematic way. It is **recommended** that the School should introduce an effective institutional mechanism to monitor formal meetings between all research degree students and their supervisors.

2.10.5 Postgraduate research students are afforded the opportunity to teach on both distance-learning and face-to-face programmes. The School suggests that to support this activity, these students have the right to access training workshops within the highly rated Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching programme. Not all research students are aware of this. The School should promote this clearly. Postgraduate students are able to enrol upon additional modules, at no extra cost to themselves. A series of sessions on transferable skills is also available to research students. Students regard these development opportunities highly.

2.10.6 In spite of the appointment of Department and Faculty representatives, the representation of postgraduate research students at a strategic level within the School is acknowledged by the School and research students as being problematic and there is a danger that the voice of research students at the strategic level goes unheard (see paragraph 2.3.5).

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.11 The quality of learning opportunities delivered as part of collaborative arrangements is managed effectively to enable students to achieve their awards.

2.11.1 The School has entered into collaboration with a number of prestigious partners. The nature of these partnerships is wholly consistent with the School's Mission. Research has to date been the chief focus of international partnerships; the School now wishes to explore future expansion of educational collaborations, but through a cautious approach. This decision has been influenced by the prevailing unpredictable international environment. The School is about to update its policy concerning collaboration.

2.11.2 The School's distance-learning provision is the responsibility of the International Programmes which was the subject of a QAA Review in 2011. This arrangement is complex but supporting arrangements have been recently clarified and confirmed.

2.11.3 This year, the School has collaborated with Kings College, London to deliver a new joint MSc Programme. It has two other longstanding joint MScs, of similar size and scope, in place with other University of London colleges.

2.11.4 There is an agreement in place with John Hopkins University, USA; the University of Washington, USA; Kilimanjaro Christian University, Tanzania; and Makerere University, Uganda to deliver an East African Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene. The Memorandum of Agreement is signed and covers a five-year period which commenced earlier this year. However, it does not contain some of the detail that might be expected in such a document and, although it is recognised that the agreement is with long-standing partners of the School, these omissions constitute a moderate risk. It is **recommended** that the School ensure that all existing collaborative partnerships have up-to-date and detailed memoranda of agreement in place; and that a policy (which incorporates a clearer articulation of due diligence processes) in line with the Quality Code is in place for the development of all new partnerships.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.12 The quality of learning opportunities delivered through flexible and distributed arrangements, including e-learning, is managed effectively.

2.12.1 Distance learning constitutes a significant proportion of the School's portfolio. It is delivered in partnership with International Programmes of the University of London. Distance Learning data are considered at the International Programmes' Quality and Student Life Cycle Committee, on which the School has representation, and at the School's Quality & Standards Committee. Within the School, matters pertaining to distance learning are also addressed at the Distance Learning Steering Group which is itself a subcommittee of the School's Learning and Teaching Committee. The School seeks to integrate the management of its taught and distance-learning provision.

2.12.2 The quality of the experience of distance-learning students is good. The modules are interesting, challenging and highly reputable. Learning materials and academic support are appropriate. Key processes around application and assessment are well managed. Staff set up activities to facilitate social integration where it is practicable to do so. Students are aware of the SRC and the system of course representation, although these are not a priority in respect of their overall experience.

2.12.3 The School seeks to avoid differentiation between distance-learning and face-to-face provision in relation to the way it allocates teachers. Accordingly, the same subject experts teach on both distance-learning and face-to-face provision. The close relationship between face-to-face and distance-learning programmes and the equity of the student learning opportunities for both modes of delivery is a **feature of good practice**. It enables comparability across modes of study. All staff teaching on distance-learning courses undertake development sessions to prepare them for that element of their role.

2.12.4 The School has recently changed its learning platform from Blackboard to Moodle. This process has been well managed and well received.

Work-based and placement learning

2.13 The quality of learning opportunities delivered through work-based and placement learning is effective.

2.13.1 The School does not have a system to facilitate work-based learning placements, but does enable a small number of students to undertake industry-based projects. These MSc students are required to submit project proposals which include assessments of risk. These arrangements were reviewed recently. For the award of Doctorates in Public Health (DrPH), there is some involvement with external organisations. Work-based projects are usually undertaken at the request of individual students.

Student charter

2.14 A student charter, setting out the mutual expectations of the School and its students, is available.

2.14.1 The School has produced a student charter in partnership with the SRC. It is comprehensive in terms of expectations and frames these in the context of the student life cycle. It contains useful links for students. The principles set out in the document are embedded within the School. However, awareness of the existence of the Charter is limited. Therefore, it would be useful for the School and the SRC to find ways to increase the awareness of the document throughout the entire learning community.

3 Information about learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of the information produced by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine about its learning opportunities **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Findings

3.1 The School produces information for its intended audience and for the public about the learning opportunities it offers that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.1.1 The School's website presents a high-quality vehicle for providing information to the public and prospective students. It has recently been redeveloped with much information being transferred from the intranet to the externally facing website. Effective links are provided from prospectus information to documents such as programme specifications and handbooks providing details of the programmes and modules, as well as material related to the application process. The availability of documents related to distance-learning programmes is sometimes less robust due to broken links between the School's and International Programmes' websites. Printed material is likewise of a high standard.

3.1.2 Responsibility for checking the currency and accuracy of programme specifications and handbooks lies with Course Directors and with Module Organisers for module specifications. The Registry is responsible for the accuracy of the prospectus information which is drawn from the programme specifications. It was not clear, however, that there is a formal sign-off process for ensuring that there was consistency between programme specifications and the published web information, and it was acknowledged that such a mechanism would secure the reliability of the information.

3.1.3 The migration of materials to the website from the intranet has improved accessibility for current students although it was acknowledged that this was work in progress. Generally both face-to-face and distance-learning students regard the information provided online, through the virtual learning environment, and in printed form as being a valuable resource.

3.1.4 Clear advice is provided for students regarding communication of outcomes and provision of degree certificates, diplomas from the University of London, and transcripts from the School.

3.1.5 Information regarding the management of standards and quality is presented on the Quality Assurance web page which includes the School's overarching Quality Assurance and Enhancement Code of Practice.

3.1.6 External examiner reports are posted on the School's website alongside the exam board and course committee reports and a summary report from the previous academic year. This gives students a comprehensive view of external examiners' recommendations and School action points. The School approach to sharing external examiners' reports with students is in accordance with HEFCE 2006/45.

4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Findings

4.1 Deliberate steps are being taken at institutional level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.1.1 The School has aligned quality assurance with enhancement and has in place a range of mechanisms that support and encourage enhancement, such as Faculty Teaching Committees. Examples of where enhancement activity had taken place to support student learning experiences include mentoring, which is a key feature of School life, and the active encouragement of student feedback (see paragraph 2.3.2). Most enhancement activity takes place at Faculty level.

4.1.2 However, there does not seem to be a shared understanding of the concept of enhancement across the School and it is only referred to briefly in a number of key documents. Committees have a role in sharing good practice and this is facilitated by Faculty Taught Course Directors who sit on a range of committees at all levels. However, there is limited central oversight or coordination of this dissemination activity. Activity can also be reactive and focused on problem-solving, rather than being proactive.

5 Theme: The experiences of international students entering UK higher education for the first time

Each academic year a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams.

The review team investigated the experiences of international students entering UK higher education for the first time at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. A large proportion of the School's student population is international. The needs of international students are met through an inclusive approach taken by the School, ensuring full integration with its support structures.

Supporting students' transition

5.1 The School's processes for supporting the transition of international students entering UK higher education for the first time are comprehensive and successful.

5.1.1 The School's Orientation and Induction programme includes a two-day International Students' Welcome event designed for international students completing London-based programmes. This programme is much appreciated and provides networking opportunities, inputs from external advisers and support on a range of practical matters including registering with a doctor, opening a bank account and so on.

5.1.2 Induction arrangements are underpinned by an Orientation and Induction Code of Practice, which has the overall aim of helping 'students adjust to life and study at the School and to prepare students for learning', with a priority of recognising the 'particular needs of students from other countries and cultures'.

5.1.3 There is no formal induction programme for research degree students who start in January; however, these students receive support from administrators and student representatives.

5.1.4 Students have the opportunity to engage in activities that enrich them in terms of culture and global awareness; the tutorial support provided to students is well-regarded.

Information for first-year students

5.2 Information for international students entering UK higher education for the first time is widely available and clearly presented.

5.2.1 The application process for international students is straightforward. Applications are generally processed quickly, and applicants value the individual contact with course directors and administrators (see paragraph 2.5.1).

5.2.2 However, UK Border Agency requirements have impacted on the applications process for international students wishing to undertake London-based courses. While the School has responded well to this, with advice and support which is focused on visa issues provided by the School's Registry and Student Adviser, and improved signposting to information on the School's website, students have nevertheless faced some difficulties (see paragraphs 2.5.1-2.5.2).

5.2.3 The School's pre-registration and orientation information for international students is comprehensive although there are some issues relating to timely publication of timetables, and some issues with the module registration process which can delay access to module materials (see paragraph 2.5.4).

5.2.4 Programme specifications and student handbooks are of good quality and explain to a diverse population of students how each course operates, including expectations of the UK Education system. They are written in such a way as not to make any assumptions about students' familiarity with UK conventions (see paragraph 1.1.3).

5.2.5 The Student Adviser attends all induction sessions, which provides an opportunity to clarify to international students the UK description of disability and specific learning difficulties, in order to ensure that international students from a variety of backgrounds and cultures are able to understand and access appropriate support where needed.

Assessment and feedback

5.3 Assessment and feedback for international students entering UK higher education for the first time is appropriate but there are areas for further development.

5.3.1 All international face-to-face and distance-learning students complete assessments early on in their studies, which provide an opportunity to identify whether additional support is needed as well as helping students to align with the UK education system.

5.3.2 Students receive feedback as standard on formative and coursework assignments with which they are broadly satisfied. No feedback is provided to students on end of year examinations: instead, students are directed to past examination papers and examiners' reports for distance-learning programmes. Distance-learning students find the generic feedback included in examiners' reports of limited value as preparation for improving their own performance in examinations.

5.3.3 International distance-learning students would welcome more notice about the dates of examinations.

Monitoring retention and progression

5.4 Monitoring, retention and progression of international students entering UK higher education for the first time is appropriate.

5.4.1 Flexibility is offered to distance-learning students regarding their participation in online sessions. Nevertheless, the School has appropriate mechanisms in place for tracking the progress and engagement of such students.

5.4.2 The School's data relating to the attainment of face-to-face students is considered by the QSC; University of London data relating to the retention and attainment of distance-learning students is considered by QSC and the Distance Learning Steering Group. Student progression, retention and completion is not currently analysed by the School by students domicile (that is, UK/international students). Therefore it is difficult to draw any conclusions about the relative attainment of the School's international student body.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions. For example, pages 18-19 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of: threshold academic standards; learning opportunities; enhancement; and public information.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:

www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.

Academic Infrastructure Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

academic standards The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Code of practice *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

credit(s) A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

enhancement Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

feature of good practice A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

framework A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

framework for higher education qualifications A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

learning opportunities The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

learning outcome What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

operational definition A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

programme specifications Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

public information Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements, along with additional topics and overarching themes.

subject benchmark statement A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

threshold academic standard The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

widening participation Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

RG 1131 03/13

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© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2013

ISBN 978 1 84979 819 8

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk.

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786