Imperial College London

**Quality Assurance and Academic Standards:
Statement of Policies and Procedures
(2019/20)**

1   Framework for Quality Assurance and Enhancement

1.1   The College offers degrees at Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral levels, together with a number of Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas. Teaching is delivered primarily within the four Faculties (Engineering, Natural Sciences, Medicine and the Business School) and the Centre for *Languages, Culture and Communication* and Centre for *Higher Education Research and Scholarship*. The College quality assures its programmes within a light touch guidance framework led from the Registry and the office of the Vice Provost (Education). This incorporates local action and specificity within a broad College structure that complies with national and European requirements[1] and guidance.

1.2   The regulations that define the College's policy framework for managing academic standards are provided in the Academic and Examination Regulations, available on-line. The procedures for Student Complaints, Appeals, Mitigating Circumstances and Academic Misconduct are all available publicly online and are designed to be fair, transparent and accessible to all students[2]. The Regulations are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure they remain fit for purpose. The College has a clear, fair and inclusive Admissions process, which is available online[3]. The College has an Access and Participation Plan (2020/21-2024/25) which sets out actions for the College to meet its requirements under the Office for Students' conditions of registration.

1.3   Governance, oversight and development of the quality and standards of College provision rests with the Senate, which is charged with promotion of the educational work of the university and the regulation, quality assurance and superintendence of the education and discipline of students.

1.4   The Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee (QAEC) has delegated authority from Senate to oversee quality and standards and a number of committees report directly to QAEC. These are the Programmes Committee, Faculty Education Committees and the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC).

1.5   QAEC is responsible for developing and advising the Senate on the implementation of College policies and procedures relating to quality assurance and audit of quality, taking into account national and international frameworks and codes of practice relating to academic standards and quality assurance, including the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) - 2015. QAEC oversees the annual review of the College's statement on quality assurance and academic standards and ensures the processes in place assure quality, maintain standards and drive improvement and enhancement.[4]

1.6   The College's quality assurance committee structure is outlined here.

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[1] Office for Students conditions of registration
[2] Core practice Q6
[3] Core practice Q1
[4] Common practice Q1

1.7 At programme level, responsibility for academic standards and the quality of the educational experience delivered rests with the Head of Department (HoD), who develops departmental educational strategy in line with the Faculty's and College's strategic goals. Thus, while quality assurance is undertaken by the College Senate through the principal committees mentioned above, the responsibility for quality management and enhancement lies with individual academic departments.

1.8 A high priority is given to continuous enhancement of the quality of learning, teaching and the student experience. Methods and mechanisms employed to enhance this include student feedback, peer observation, programme monitoring and review, professional development for staff and academic and pastoral support for students. These features are key to attracting able students through a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system[5], to ensuring from admission through to completion all students are provided with the support they need to succeed in and benefit from their higher education experience at the College[6] and to maintaining a high-quality academic experience which consistently and reliably results in the high standards of outcomes expected of Imperial graduates[7].

2 Approval of Undergraduate and Master's Programmes

2.1 Proposals for new programmes of study usually originate from discussions at departmental level. All proposals for new programmes and major modifications to existing programmes are discussed in departments and by the relevant Faculty Education Committee, and must have the approval of the Head of Department and Faculty Operating Officer before submission to the Programmes Committee. This is where proposals from departments receive detailed scrutiny and approval before submission to QAEC (who acts on behalf of Senate), and where any other major changes to programmes are approved. The membership of the Programmes Committee includes representation from senior academic staff responsible for the delivery of undergraduate or postgraduate teaching in each Faculty, thus ensuring that proposals are subject to peer review from practitioners in related discipline areas. There is also student representation on these committees which ensures opinion from students is taken into account in the decision making process[8]. The College supports multidisciplinary collaborations so in some cases proposals for new programmes may span more than one department or Faculty, in these cases, strategic approval is required before the detailed proposal can be considered.

2.2 Proposals for programmes need to demonstrate consideration of the [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#) (FHEQ) and [Subject Benchmark Statements](#) (SBS). This ensure the threshold standards are consistent with the FHEQ and students have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other providers[9].

2.2 Approval of undergraduate and Master's level programmes includes external review. After discussion and approval within the department, the proposal is sent for external review and the department have the opportunity to revise the proposal in the light of reviewers' comments[10]. The next stage is scrutiny of the proposal by the Programmes Committee, as described above. Here, the programme proposal, together with the external reviewers' reports and departmental response to the

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[5] Core practice Q1
[6] Expectation Q2
[7] Expectation Q1
[8] Core practice Q2
[9] Core practices S1 and S2
[10] Common practice Q2

reviewers' reports are considered. The Programmes Committee will decide, at this stage, whether to recommend to QAEC the approval of the proposal with or without modification or to reject it. Only after approval by QAEC will a programme be opened for applications. This process ensures the College delivers well-designed programmes and assures there are sufficient appropriate staff and resources to support their delivery[11]. During the second or third year of operation of a new undergraduate programme, a second stage review will take place. This involves detailed and rigorous review involving external reviewers and seeks confirmation that the original objectives of the new programme are being achieved. The second stage review is considered by the Programmes Committee. For Master's programmes, departments are required to give a brief account of their new Master's level programmes as part of their annual monitoring. This narrative focuses on the entry qualifications of the first cohort of students and their exit awards and is reported to the Programmes Committee.

2.4   The full procedures for the approval of new programmes are available in the *Procedures for the Approval and Review of New and Existing Undergraduate Programmes* and the *Procedures for the Approval and Review of Master's Degrees*. Both are available to download here.

2.5   Major modifications to existing programmes and the withdrawal and suspension of programmes also come under the purview of Programmes Committee.

3   Monitoring and Review of Programmes

3.1   External Examiners[12]

3.1.1   The external examiner system and Boards of Examiners are central to the process by which the College monitors the reliability and validity of its assessment procedures and academic standards. External examiners' primary duties are to ensure that the standard of the College's degrees is consistent with that of the national sector; to ensure that assessment processes measure student achievement reliably, rigorously, fairly and transparently and that the College is maintaining the academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements[13]. External examiners gather evidence to support their judgement through the review of programme materials, approval of draft question papers, moderation of examination scripts, projects and coursework and, in some instances, through participation in *viva voce* and clinical examinations. External examiners are members of Boards of Examiners and participate in the determination of degree classifications and student progress.

3.1.2   Information about the roles, powers and responsibilities assigned to external examiners is available on the College's external examiner website here.

3.1.3   External examiners are nominated by departments and the nominations are scrutinised and approved by the Vice Provost (Education) or nominee. The College has detailed guidelines for departments on the nomination and approval of external examiners, incorporating sector guidance. All external examiners are invited to attend an Induction Day, combining a formal session of background briefing on the College academic structure, its expectations of external examiners and how

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[11] Core practices Q2, Q3 and Q4
[12] Core practice S4 and Common practice Q2
[13] Expectation S1 and core practice S4

it responds to external examiner reports, with an opportunity to visit the department to which they are appointed.

3.1.4 External examiners are asked to submit a written report giving detailed feedback on the assessment process and the academic standards of the awards. The reports are considered by departments who are required to provide a formal response to the comments made by the external examiner; the Registry team provide advice on issues raised which are not within the purview of the department. The report, with the departmental response, is then sent to the Vice Provost (Education) for scrutiny. The Vice Provost (Education) will highlight areas where further action is required (and therefore seek further assurances from a department on the resolution of a particular problem) and will also highlight instances of good practice. In cases where further action is required, the report is then returned to the department to take appropriate action. A College wide summary report on all reports is produced and considered by Faculty Education Committees, QAEC and Senate. Following consideration of the reports, the Registry provides feedback to external examiners.

3.2 Annual Monitoring of Undergraduate and Master's Level Programmes

3.2.1 The Faculty Education Committees review and consider, on an annual basis, teaching provision within their departments. Departmental annual monitoring reports are considered in detail by the relevant Faculty Education Committees, who use the exercise to not only evaluate the provision but also to identify good practice that can be highlighted to QAEC and Senate for wider circulation through a Faculty level summary.

3.2.2 The review of external examiner reports is incorporated within the annual monitoring process as is the review of the management of departmental collaborative provision, ensuring there are effective arrangements in place to deliver high-quality academic experience with and through partners. The annual monitoring process draws on student feedback, through consideration of feedback obtained through formal and informal mechanisms including surveys.[14] The annual monitoring process also considers data on student performance, in line with the data used in the Teaching Excellence Framework.

3.2.3 Feedback from employers and Professional, Statutory and/or Regulatory Bodies is considered to assure the value of qualifications at the point of being awarded and over time[15] and to support all students achieve successful professional outcomes[16].

3.2.4 The annual monitoring process included student consultation, through the consideration of the annual monitoring reports at Staff-Student Committees or equivalent mechanisms.

3.3 Research Degrees: Precept Review

3.3.1 The College's Senate has endorsed a set of precepts governing research degree procedures, which draw together existing College regulations and QAA guidelines. These are supplemented by a set of collaborative research degree precepts, which outline the additional requirements with which departments offering collaborative

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[14] Common practice Q3
[15] Expectation S2
[16] Core practice Q9

programmes should comply. The precepts ensure that from entry through to completion, research students are supported to succeed within a supportive research environment.[17]

3.3.2   The PRQC measures departmental practice against the precepts. These reviews are normally conducted once every three years except where a department is within one year of a periodic review in which case the key elements of the precept review are addressed within the periodic review (section 3.5 below). The PRQC not only evaluates the provision but also identifies good practice that can be highlighted to QAEC/Senate for wider circulation. It also agrees any follow up action required. A summary of the outcomes of the reviews are reported to Senate annually.

3.4   Periodic Review

3.4.1   The College has two procedures for departmental periodic reviews. These are found, in the *Procedures for the Review of Taught Provision* (currently suspended) and at doctoral level, in the *Procedures for the Review of Departmental Research Degree Provision.* The procedures for the review of Departmental research degree provision is available at the following link.

3.4.2   Periodic reviews of departmental taught provision previously took place approximately every five years and was closely aligned with accreditation where possible so that the same or similar documentation compiled for accreditation could be used for periodic review, thus reducing the burden placed on departments.   The annual monitoring returns also formed part of the periodic review documentation. As part of the review, Departments with Master's programmes were asked to demonstrate the programmes' alignment with the College's Master's Level Precepts which draw together existing College regulations and QAA guidelines. Periodic review of departmental research degree provision takes place normally every six years and considers departmental practice against the College's research degree precepts (section 3.3). Periodic review for taught programmes has been suspended while taught provision was undergoing Curriculum Review but its reintroduction is being considered.

3.4.3   In all cases, a review panel, comprising both internal and external members, a review officer as well as a student representative, is invited to spend up to two days in the department under review to consider documentation, meet with staff and students of the department and to see departmental facilities. The review officer will produce a report on behalf of the panel which will detail the panel's conclusions, including any areas of good practice identified by the panel and recommendations for further enhancement.   The department is then required to make a formal response to the report which will include an action plan to address the Panel's recommendations. The confirmed report and the department's response to the reports are considered by the QAEC for taught programmes and the PRQC for research degree programmes and any appropriate period of follow-up agreed. A summary report of reviews is made to Senate annually.

4.   Collaborative Provision and Placements

Collaborative Provision

4.1   The College definition of collaborative provision (based on the QAA description) is: "*all learning opportunities leading or contributing to the award of academic credit or*

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[17] Core practice Q7

a qualification that are delivered, assessed or supported through an arrangement with one or more organisations other than the degree-awarding body."

4.2   The College has a number of collaborative arrangements with partner institutions/organisations for undergraduate, Master's and research degree programmes. The College's Register of Collaborative Provision is available [here](#).

4.3   This webpage also provides details of the procedures which have been established by the College to assure the quality and standards of its collaborative provision.

4.4   New Collaboration

4.4.1   The academic rationale for establishing a collaborative programme must be clearly documented and should be commensurate with the College's mission, vision and strategy.

4.4.2   Proposals for establishing new collaborative programmes are initially considered by the Provost's Board. The Provost's Board is responsible for approving the proposed partner institution/organisation. Once strategic approval of a new partner has been granted, the proposal is referred to the Programmes Committee (for taught programmes) or the PRQC (for research programmes) for consideration as outlined in section 2 above. Additionally, the Committee will ensure that appropriate and proportionate due diligence enquiries have been satisfactorily undertaken. The proposal will need to demonstrate that effective arrangements would be in place to ensure a high-quality academic experience and credible and secure academic standards[18].

4.4.3   The relevant Committee may recommend to QAEC approval of the proposed programme, with or without modification or may reject it.

4.4.4   Subject to QAEC approval, the Registry must arrange for an agreement to be signed by all Parties before commencement of the new programme.

4.4.5   The establishment of collaborative modules - individual modules which form part of an Imperial College award but that are taught and assessed by another institution/organisation - is covered by a separate procedure, available [here](#). All collaborative modules must be approved by the Programmes Committee and QAEC and an agreement governing the arrangement must be signed. New partners may also need strategic approval from the Provost's Board prior to approval from the Programmes Committee/QAEC.

4.4.6   All collaborative agreements are normally subject to renewal every five years.

4.5   Review of Collaborative Partnerships and Programmes

4.5.1   At the time of strategic approval of a new collaborative programme, the Provost's Board will also determine whether an initial site visit is needed. The nature and frequency of any continuing site visits to the partner will be decided by the Programmes Committee or PRQC.

4.5.2   Partnerships are normally subject to renewal every five-six years. A sub-group of QAEC will meet annually and consider all partnerships due to expire within 18 months as well as any partnerships where information has arisen which changes the

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[18] Core practices S3 and Q7

risk level of the arrangement (either in relation to the partner or the collaboration arrangement itself). The sub-group will draw on expertise from across the College, including representatives from the International Office, Legal Services, Registry, the Education and Research Offices as needed as well as receive input from the department/faculty. This review focuses on the strategic benefit of the collaborative partnership and any risks to the continuation of the relationship, drawing on existing and/or updated due diligence as appropriate (for example, if the activities are significantly extended or if the ownership of a delivery organisation or support provider changes), key metrics and feedback from the department/faculty team involved in the collaboration. Individual programme reviews will continue to be carried out through existing periodic review processes and/or through arrangements set out in the Memorandum of Agreement. The sub-group will make recommendations to QAEC and to Provost's Board; Provost's Board will make a decision on whether to continue the partnership based on the strategic context and QAEC will advise on any next steps to address risk and quality in the partnership, including whether changes need to be submitted to the Programmes Committee or PRQC.

4.5.3 The routine monitoring and review of programmes incorporates a review of collaborative activity, where applicable. Additionally, departments with collaborative programmes are asked to provide information about such programmes as part of their periodic review submission and periodic review panels are invited to comment specifically on these.

4.5.4 The College has a small number of collaborative research degree programmes which are not "owned" by one department and are therefore not covered adequately by the departmental/programme level reviews. A separate review procedure has therefore been developed for such programmes and is available from at the following link.

4.6   Accreditation

4.6.1 A number of programmes are accredited by relevant Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies. Programme and Departmental staff are responsible for identifying relevant accrediting bodies and pursuing initial accreditation and delivering on any requirements set out by the accrediting bodies, including providing them with outcomes of reviews and informing them of changes to provision. Students are made aware of any requirements for achieving individual accreditation, including choosing particular modules and meeting particular assessment requirements. Departments are expected to review their accreditation arrangements through the annual monitoring process to ensure these continue to enhance all students' professional outcomes.[19]

4.7   Placements

4.7.1 The College's Placement Learning Policy outlines the College's definition of a placement and the responsibilities of the College to students selected and preparing for and undertaking a placement, the rights and responsibilities of placement students themselves and what is expected from placement providers. This policy is supported by a framework of Good Practice for curriculum-based placements at all levels of study and undergraduate extra-ECTS placements. The Good Practice includes the roles and responsibilities of both a Placement Manager and a Placement Tutor. All documents are available to view here.

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[19] Core practice Q9

4.7.2 The management of student exchange partnerships and agreements is dealt with in accordance with the College's Procedure for the Establishment, Renewal & Review of Student Exchange Partners, available <u>here</u>. All exchange partnerships are subject to initial approval by the Faculty Education Committees (for taught programmes) and PRQC (for research programmes) as appropriate and are normally subject to renewal every five years. Initial approval or renewal of a partnership should be in place before an agreement is signed.

5. Enhancement of Student Learning Opportunities

5.1 Students are invited to participate in surveys so that student feedback on the College and its programmes can be obtained and used to enhance provision. Survey results are considered as part of annual monitoring and periodic review but are also considered independently of these processes through the academic governance structure.

External surveys in which students participate include (but are not limited to):

- National Student Survey (NSS)
- Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)
- Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)

Internal surveys include (but are not limited to):

- UG SOLE lecturer/module evaluations
- PG SOLE lecturer/module evaluation
- Student Experience Survey

5.2 Graduates are invited to participate in the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey (DLHE) which provides the College with information on the activities of students following graduation, including their progression into further study and employment. Consideration of DLHE data helps the College ensure all students are achieving successful academic and professional outcomes[20].

5.3 At College level, student representatives are members of all quality assurance Committees and at departmental level the Staff-Student Committees provide an opportunity for students to provide feedback to their departments directly.

5.3 Under the currently suspended Periodic Review of Taught Provision, students participated in periodic reviews of Departments with one student representative from the Union's Officer Trustee team acting as a member of the review panel on undergraduate reviews and one representative from the Graduate Students' Union (GSU) on postgraduate reviews, with other students who belong to the department under review taking part in meetings with the panel.

6. Assurance of Standards

6.1 In addition to the processes described above, the Senate and its sub-committees regularly receive and consider quantitative data on student achievement. These include degree classifications, examination failure rates and research degree submission rates. Consideration of this data assists the College in ensuring all students are supported to achieve successful academic outcomes[21] while assuring

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[20] Core practice Q9
[21] Core practice Q9

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the academic standards of programmes are in line with sector-recognised standards and consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks[22].

7.   Student Engagement

7.1   Staff and students work together in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of the educational experience[23]. The student body influences on-going developments of learning opportunities. Student representatives sit on all quality assurance committees and also make an important contribution to those committees with an educational strategy focus. Briefings occur between the newly elected Officer Trustees and the President, Provost, Vice-Provost (Education), College Secretary and Registrar, Academic Registrar, the Director of Student Support, and senior staff within the Library. The ICU also provides specific training for its student representatives, which has been very well received.

7.2   Imperial College Union has approximately 500 academic representatives for whom it provides academic representation training. Currently, all elected academic representatives are invited to attend one of three 1.5 hour training sessions run by the Union (one for UG student representatives and two for PG student representatives). The training session includes an introduction to Union and College structure, the representation network structure and how it works, College and Union welfare services and how to be an effective student representative. Student representation handbooks are also provided. Additionally, the PG representation training includes an introduction to the Graduate School. More information about representation training provided by the Union can be found here. The Graduate School also provides information and training for PG Representatives.

7.3   Staff-Student Committees are the primary arenas for staff-student engagement at a departmental level. Staff-Student Committees are run slightly differently according to the size and UG:PG ratio of the department. Most departments have separate committees for undergraduates and postgraduates. A range of issues are discussed from UG SOLE and PG SOLE results, external examiner reports, annual monitoring reports and curriculum changes to practical issues, such as the availability of computers and pastoral care. Staff-Student Committees are often chaired by a student, normally a Departmental Representative, who will liaise with the department and fellow students to agree an agenda for the meeting in advance.

7.4   The College's Staff-Student Committee good practice guidelines can be found at the following link.

7.5   The student body is encouraged to provide feedback on learning opportunities through surveys such as UG SOLE, PG SOLE, PRES, PTES and NSS. Student representation on all committees where these results are discussed ensures that students work closely with staff to resolve issues raised and that any action taken is communicated back to the student body.

8.   Student Protection

8.1   The College has in place a Student Protection Plan in accordance with its conditions of registration with the Office for Students. Student protection plans set out what students can expect to happen should a course, campus, or institution close. The purpose of a plan is to ensure that students can continue and complete their studies, or can be compensated if this is not possible.

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[22] Expectation S1 and S2
[23] Core practice Q5; Common practice Q3

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