

University of London International Programmes
Quality Assurance and Student Lifecycle Sub-Committee

THEMATIC REVIEW OF SPECIAL ADMISSIONS

Background

At the meeting of QASL held in January 2015 it was confirmed that the theme of Special Admissions would be reviewed during 2014-15. The Thematic Review was conducted during June and July 2015 and included a panel meeting to consider previously circulated documentation regarding the theme. In accordance with existing International Programmes thematic review policy, the panel membership was approved by the Chair of the University of London International Academy Academic Committee.

Further details of the methodology used for the review are included within section 3 of the final review report attached for members' consideration.

Review Findings

The conclusions, recommendations and areas of good practice highlighted by the review panel are included for consideration by QASL within the attached report (sections 5, 6 and 7).

In particular, QASL members' attention is drawn to recommendations 7(a) regarding the 'Special Admissions Panel' and 7(b) concerning suggested revisions to the appeals process for special admissions. QASL members' attention is also drawn to the panel's commendations, particularly 6(a) regarding the existence of a special admissions process and 6(c) concerning the working methods of those engaged with special admissions within the International Programmes.

Action required

The QASL is invited to **consider** the report and **endorse** the conclusions, recommendations and aspects of good practice arising from the Thematic Review of the policies and procedures relating to Special Admissions.

Quality Team
Quality, Standards and Governance
August 2015

Thematic Review

2014/2015

Report: Special Admissions

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A thematic review of the policies and procedures associated with special admissions was conducted from June to July 2015 using a meeting of the review panel, supplemented by desk-based research to produce documentation.

The theme of special admissions was selected for scrutiny during the 2014-15 academic year following discussion at the University of London International Academy's Quality Assurance and Student Lifecycle Sub-committee (QASL) in January 2015. The focus of the panel's deliberations was the policies and procedures concerning special admissions within the context of the overall admissions process.

The purpose of thematic review is outlined in paragraph 2 of this report and the strategy and methodology followed is detailed in paragraph 3.

The main findings of the review panel are as follows:

- That special admissions policies and procedures in operation within the International Programmes were fit for purpose and that decisions were well informed;
- That some key principles and precedents did not appear to be documented appropriately and that this should be addressed;
- That there was a significant amount of activity regarding special admissions within the International Programmes and the willingness of colleagues to provide information and discuss ideas for the purposes of the review was acknowledged; and
- That the positive culture in evidence within the special admissions team contributed to an informed, efficient, consistent and transparent approach to special admissions.

Full details of commendations, areas of good practice and recommendations identified by the panel are provided in paragraphs 6 and 7 of the report. Key recommendations for the improvement and enhancement of special admissions are:

- That details of the Special Admissions Panel's (SAP's) constitution, membership, remit and operation should be captured and articulated clearly;
- That details regarding the appeals process relating to decisions made by the SAP should be developed and applied to all applications considered by the SAP (i.e. at undergraduate and postgraduate levels);
- That current documentation should be checked for disparities and anomalies, and that this documentation should be amended accordingly; and
- That the quality and quantity of data regarding special admissions produced be developed so that this information may be used to monitor the progress (and final achievements) of students admitted via the special admissions process.

This report is submitted to QASL in September 2015. The QASL is invited to consider the recommendations, to note areas of good practice and to approve, allocate responsibility for, and monitor, further actions arising from this report.

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REVIEW PANEL DETAILS

- Chair** Dr Stuart Anderson
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Member of the University of London International Academy Academic Committee
(Also, Chair of the University of London International Programmes Complaints Resolution Panel)
- External member:** Dr Ann Rumpus
Head, Educational Initiative Centre,
University of Westminster (retired)
Member of the University of London International Academy Learning, Teaching and Assessment Sub-committee
- International Programmes:** Mr Harry Evans
Qualifications and Special Admissions Co-ordinator
Admissions Office
University of London International Programmes
- Member of QASL:** Mr John Ferra
Deputy Director of the University of London International Programmes at LSE
London School of Economics and Political Science
(*attended via Skype*)
- Student member:** Ms Hannah McHugh
Undergraduate Student member of the University of London International Academy Learning, Teaching and Assessment Sub-committee
- Review Secretary:** Mrs Rebecca Cook
Project Manager (Thematic Review)
Quality, Standards and Governance (formerly Corporate Performance and Quality)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Thematic reviews are central to the University's systems for assuring the quality and standards of its International Programmes provision. Whereas Annual Programme Planning and Review (APPR) and Periodic Programme Review (PPR) are organised around academic programmes of study, thematic review takes a horizontal snapshot on a specific theme across the International Programmes and complements both APPR and PPR, enabling the University, as the awarding body, to review provision and, in conjunction with Lead Colleges/Consortia, to monitor the standard of the award and/or quality of provision.
- 1.2 At its meeting held on 23 January 2015 the QASL agreed that a thematic review of the special admissions policies and processes would be undertaken during the 2014-15 academic year. A panel was duly constituted, and approved by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (International), to conduct the thematic review of special admissions policies and processes by consideration of appropriate documentation at a meeting to be held on 10th July 2015. This report considers the discussions and outcomes of the panel meeting concerning special admissions.

2. PURPOSE

- 2.1 The purpose of thematic review, as defined within the International Academy's thematic review procedures (March 2011), is to:
- critically review a specific theme with respect to compliance with policy, process and procedure, the reliability of information and completeness of practice;
 - establish that current policy and practice is fit for purpose and informed by developing knowledge and practice in the relevant external arena;
 - make recommendations for the enhancement of the theme under review.
- 2.2 In addition, for the thematic reviews conducted during 2013, panels were asked to:
- identify opportunities to enhance the quality of the International Programmes students' experience, including further developments and/or dissemination of areas of good practice.

3. STRATEGY AND METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 Thematic reviews normally consist of:
- Audit: where practice is reviewed with regard to compliance, efficiency and effectiveness, and which mainly centres on administrative matters;
 - Enquiry: where a more in-depth investigation is conducted evaluating practice in the light of developing knowledge and practice in the relevant external area.
- 3.2 Thematic review is investigative and involves scrutiny, analysis and evaluation. The process requires the systematic gathering and collation of information relating to the scheme under scrutiny.
- 3.3 The aims and terms of reference for the thematic review of special admissions were as follows:
- To critically review special admissions procedures across the International Programmes with respect to compliance with policy, process and procedure, the reliability of information and completeness of practice:
 - with specific references to the International Programmes admissions procedures (undergraduate, postgraduate and special admissions).
 - To establish that current policy and practice is fit for purpose, and informed by developing knowledge and practice in the relevant external arena:
 - taking into consideration any available external points of reference (*'Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B2, Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education', QAA*);
 - taking into consideration any available internal documentation relevant to the theme (*confidential mapping grid produced by the International Programmes group in 2014 relating to Chapter B2 of the 'Quality Code for Higher Education', QAA*);
 - with reference to good practice in the UK higher education sector;
 - To make recommendations as to the enhancement of the special admissions procedures in relation to areas requiring further development.

- To make recommendations as to how policy and procedural documentation in relation to special admissions for the International Programmes might be further developed to ensure that it is fit for purpose.
- 3.4 The chair was appointed from the membership of the University of London International Academy Academic Committee and a panel was convened on the following basis:
- One external academic with knowledge of the area under review
 - One member from the University of London International Programmes central administration (with knowledge of special admissions procedures)
 - One member of the QASL
 - One student member of the panel (drawn from the International Programmes sub-committees).
- 3.5 The Terms of Reference, the methodology for the review and type of documentation to be scrutinised were based on those used for thematic reviews conducted in 2013. Panel members considered documentation and focussed in particular on information provided which detailed both the International Programmes procedures and the wider UK context for special admissions.
- 3.6 The panel meeting held as part of the thematic review of special admissions did not include direct consideration by the panel of material containing references to student or staff names or identification. However, at the meeting the Chair reminded members that during discussions the need might arise to illustrate a particular point by the use of a real life example. Therefore, members needed to be aware that they might encounter material during the meeting which could potentially include confidential information.
- 3.7 The thematic review draft report was circulated via email to the Chair and Panel members for comment on factual accuracy.

4. OVERVIEW

Definitions

- 4.1 It was clarified that, in general, throughout the English HE sector two distinct phrases were often associated with the admission of students. These were 'admissions criteria' and 'admissions selection criteria'. Admissions criteria were those items that an applicant must fulfil to gain entry to a course or programme whereas admissions selection was a process normally associated with on campus tuition where there were constraining factors at work which determined a practical upper limit to programme numbers. In the case of the International Programmes (to the knowledge of the panel) there were no selection criteria in place and it was purely a case of determining an applicant's eligibility on the grounds of meeting the particular admissions criteria for their chosen programme.
- 4.2 The panel noted that within Chapter B2 of the QAA's 'Quality Code' (*'Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education'*) there were no specific references to either consideration of special cases of admission or the processes advocated in such cases. The panel therefore agreed to consider the Indicators within Chapter B2 within the context of special admissions for the International Programmes (see also paragraphs 4.32 to 4.36).

Introduction to discussions

- 4.3 At the outset of the discussions, the Chair noted that there appeared to be three main areas for consideration, namely the discussion of discrepancies and inconsistencies in the documentation, points of good practice concerning procedures and recommendations to clarify and strengthen existing procedures. Members of the panel agreed with this synopsis and based their comments on these categories.

Current procedures for special admissions

- 4.4 In addition, the fact that one of the panel's initial comments was to observe that it was commendable that the International Programmes had a policy of considering special admissions cases at all. In addition, that fact that this had been in place for many years was also commendable and fitted well with one of the main aims of the International Programmes regarding widening access to higher education learning opportunities. This also aligned to Indicator 1 of Chapter 2 of the 'Quality Code' (concerning the organisation's strategies).

- 4.5 It was explained that, for postgraduate special admissions cases, (i.e. where applicants did not meet the stated admissions criteria), these were all referred to the relevant Programme Director.
- 4.6 For undergraduate special admissions cases a proportion of these were referred to the relevant Programme Director (where there was no clear precedent to follow). It was clarified that the undergraduate special admissions referrals usually related to mature students (over 21 years of age) and often featured a period of work experience as part of the application.
- 4.7 The panel were not concerned that different processes existed to consider undergraduate and postgraduate special admissions. However, during discussions, panel members agreed that it was important to ensure equity within practice (whether at undergraduate or postgraduate level) and to use the same principles for admissions criteria across the International Programmes provision.
- 4.8 The panel noted that a series of decision categories were in use regarding special admissions. This was to provide a breakdown of reasons to admit students which could then be recorded (using a code letter) on SITS. The panel noted this practice and suggested that it could become a useful tool in monitoring students' progress.
- 4.9 It was confirmed that although applicants received an initial acknowledgement they were not specifically informed if their application was referred to the SAP. This was in part due to the advances in turnaround times particularly at certain times of the year when the number of applications received was slightly less than at peak times. In these circumstances it was suggested that applicants whose details had been referred to the SAP might believe that their application had not been given due consideration if there was a quick turnaround. It was clarified that this was not the case and it was the use of electronic means which had assisted in reducing consideration times. While the panel appreciated the improvements in response times to applicants for admissions in general (and including the use of the SAP if needed) it was suggested that it would be preferable to keep applicants informed if their details required consideration by the SAP. It was further suggested that an appropriate timescale for undergraduate applications should be to consider and respond to 90% of applications within seven working days.
- 4.10 The panel noted that no applicant was 'rejected outright' for the undergraduate programmes. This was because letters to applicants regarding the outcome of their application were tailored to include information on alternative options, if applicable. These options could include the offer to study another award (for example, Cert HE instead of degree level) or guidance about further qualifications to obtain to comply with the admissions criteria for their preferred programme. Details of what students could expect (in terms of the level and volume of work) were included in handbooks also available from the International Programmes' web pages. The practice of suggesting further options for each applicant (if they were not successfully admitted to the programme of their choice initially) and conveying this by letter in a timely and constructive manner was commended by the panel.

Discrepancies in information

- 4.11 The panel noted that the documentation provided to the panel contained some discrepancies in terms of information, including data on the number of applicants considered by the Special Admissions Panel (SAP). During discussion of this point it was clarified that often a collective number was provided for student admissions (for example, 19,000) but that it was sometimes not noted that this was a total for all students (i.e. undergraduate, postgraduate, Diploma and Certificate applicants).
- 4.12 It was also noted that discrepancies could arise due to the nature of constructive assistance given by the Admissions Team. For example, an applicant wishing to be admitted to study for the BA English award might not fulfil the admissions criteria. However, it could be that the applicant did meet the requirements for the Cert HE in English and so the Admissions Team would advise of this possibility. While this would be useful information for the applicant, it could create issues with recording of data for admissions as the student would have applied for one award (the BA English) but been admitted to another (the Cert HE).
- 4.13 In terms of data relating to special admissions there also appeared to be discrepancies in the documentation provided to the panel. One example of this was the number of cases considered by the SAP. Within the documentation two figures were quoted (509 and 678) from two different documents. This anomaly was acknowledged and it was suggested that it could have appeared if the data had been drawn either from two

different academic years or from different 'snapshot' points from the same year. There was also the consideration that applicants referred to the SAP and who were subsequently requested to provide additional documentation did not respond further so these cases could skew the data slightly.

- 4.14 Within the undergraduate admissions procedures document four outcome options were stated. However, within the procedures relating to special admissions five possible outcomes were provided. The panel noted that the fifth option for special admissions was the provisional offer of study on an alternative award (see also the BA/Cert HE English example cited in paragraph 4.12 above).
- 4.15 Information contained in the admissions procedures for postgraduate programmes also contained an anomaly about the location of consideration of special admissions cases (page 6). The panel noted that there appeared to be confusion about whether the Postgraduate Programme Director or the SAP considered special admissions cases (see also 'Constitution, Membership and Remit of the SAP' below).
- 4.16 Although the panel commented on the constructive nature of advice given by the Admissions Team to applicants, it was agreed that further work would be required to determine how data would be recorded relating to admissions, and special admissions in particular. It was also noted that consideration about the presentation of data to include explanatory notes about when the data had been captured would be very useful.

Monitoring and tracking special admissions

- 4.17 Related to the discrepancies concerning the data provided to the panel was the idea of using information to monitor the progress (and final achievements) of students admitted via the special admissions process. The panel suggested that collection of more detailed data could be used to track the performance of these students so as to build up a picture over time of trends regarding special admissions (either overall or by programme). Information of this nature, to be recorded using SITS, could also be used to initiate case studies of individual students who had successfully completed their awards (see also paragraph 4.29 regarding potential use of case studies as a form of information to prospective students).
- 4.18 Building on the idea of monitoring students who had gained entry via use of special admissions process, it was suggested that information collected on their progress could be reported through the existing APPR events as this would fit with the section on student statistics for each programme. The panel agreed that this mechanism could work well and would be particularly useful to highlight the progress of independent learners (i.e. students not attending a recognised teaching institution).

Appeals

- 4.19 In terms of appeals from applicants relating to special admissions, the panel heard that the number had risen from 15 (October 2013) to 24 (October 2014). However, the panel concurred that these were small numbers in the context of the admissions numbers overall and it was explained that recording of special admissions appeals only began in 2013.
- 4.20 From calculations provided by the Chair (and based on figures given within the panel's documentation) the panel noted that the number of special admissions appeals upheld had decreased from 90% (2013) to 40% (2014). It was explained that appeal cases could involve the provision of additional documentary evidence from applicants (which sometimes did not materialise) and so this affected the data.
- 4.21 The panel considered the mechanisms available to hear appeals from students and/or applicants regarding special admissions decisions made by the SAP. It was confirmed that, for undergraduate programmes, appeals against a decision made by the SAP were handled by the relevant Programme Director and there was no consistent system in place for postgraduate appeals concerning the SAP. The panel agreed that this process should be strengthened to include all applicants (i.e. undergraduate and postgraduate), bring in different stages and increase the element of neutrality. It was suggested that a similar model could be used to that in place already for student complaints that worked by considering due process and possible bias.
- 4.22 The panel suggested that there could be three stages of a revised special admissions appeals process, mirroring the procedures in use for complaints, as follows:

Stage 1: Appeal against decision of the SAP considered by the relevant Programme Director;

Stage 2: If no resolution at Stage 1, appeal then considered by a relevant academic member of staff at a suitable level from the Lead College concerned;

Stage 3: If no resolution at Stage 3, appeal then considered by the International Programmes Complaints Resolution Panel.

- 4.23 The panel also suggested that the revised process for considering appeals against decisions made by the SAP should be clearly documented and made available.

Constitution, Membership and Remit of the SAP

- 4.24 Several members of the panel commented on the constitution, membership and remit of the SAP and the fact that it had been difficult to establish a clear picture of these from the documentation provided. It was confirmed that the SAP had been in existence for several years and had originally been made up of a group of individuals (with relevant experience) who met each week and considered special admissions cases (by looking at hard copies of applications). During the past few years the SAP had evolved into a 'virtual panel' partly so that a greater number of colleagues could be called upon and partly to expedite the overall admissions process for applicants.
- 4.25 The thematic review panel did not foresee any issues with the name of 'Special Admissions Panel' but did comment on the lack of explicit information regarding the SAP's constitution, membership and remit (including a minimum number from within the SAP required to consider the cases).
- 4.26 The panel was unclear from the information available about the precise arrangements for consideration of applications including work experience (i.e. from mature applicants). It was explained that in cases involving work experience the application would be referred to the relevant Programme Director for consideration. The panel concurred that further detail about the process for considering applications that included work experience should be added to the International Programmes material on special admissions.
- 4.27 The panel's comments on the nature of the SAP also extended to the role of 'Special Admissions Co-ordinator' within the International Programmes. While several members of the panel commended the work of the Special Admissions Co-ordinator there was a suggestion that increased description of this role and its link to the work of the SAP would be beneficial to students and assist in increasing the transparency of information available on special admissions. In summarising this item of discussion it was confirmed that the Special Admissions Co-ordinator (and other colleagues from the Admissions Team) followed precedent and the SAP set the precedents. The panel commended this as good practice but agreed that additional information to explain this and to clarify further detail about the SAP would be desirable. In particular, the panel suggested that precedents used as part of the special admissions process should be set down and codified (for internal recording purposes) so that relevant colleagues could use this information to inform decisions in future.

Information available regarding special admissions

- 4.28 The panel noted that there was a balance to be achieved between widening the opportunities for higher education study and setting out expectations of students during the course of their chosen programme. It was agreed that this was an important feature of information available on the International Programmes website, including those pages describing special admissions, so as to provide relevant information to prospective students about what to expect once registered on a programme.
- 4.29 In considering the information available to prospective applicants (including details on the web pages) the panel agreed that it would be particularly beneficial to include more information on entry as a mature student. This could include some case studies from existing or past students who would be prepared to use their stories as examples of what could be achieved through the recognition of relevant (work) experience of older applicants. The panel noted that any additional information would need to be carefully planned so as to be helpful but would not inadvertently raise any discrimination issues.
- 4.30 There was some discussion regarding inclusive practice related to special admissions and the information available on this area to prospective students. The panel agreed that there was no mention of students having special needs and requiring particular assistance to undertake their studies within material concerning special admissions. It was explained that offer letters to new students included supplementary details to ask if the applicant had any special circumstances which could be supported during the course of their study with the International Programmes. Using this method it was only once a prospective student had been accepted on to

their chosen programme that special circumstances were taken into account thereby treating all applicants equally. It was explained that the needs of students with disabilities would be considered by a separate unit within the International Programmes using existing practices. While the panel was pleased to hear of the mechanisms in place to support students with particular needs it was agreed that it would be beneficial to include information on these mechanisms within the admissions web pages.

- 4.31 The panel agreed that the website and other sources of information regarding special admissions encouraged prospective applicants (and Institutions) to contact colleagues from the Admissions Team with queries relating to various aspects of their intended application. The panel commended the Special Admissions Co-ordinator and the Admissions Team in general on this point. It was noted that colleagues from Institutions offering support for the International Foundation Programme, Diplomas in the EMFSS suite, Diploma in Law and the Diploma in Computing and Information Systems programmes (where attendance at a recognised Institution was compulsory and would involve Cert HE applications in 2016-17) could also contact the Admissions Team with queries relating to applications.

External quality assurance and enhancement references

- 4.32 In considering external (UK) quality assurance and enhancement principles relating to special admissions, the panel referred to two documents in particular. These were Chapter B2 of the QAA's 'Quality Code' (*'Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education'*) and a detailed mapping grid. This grid had been produced in Summer 2014 by a specially convened group working on behalf of the International Programmes to 'map' current admissions policies and procedures against the 'Expectation' and 'Indicators' within Chapter 2. The panel noted that both the chapter from the Quality Code and the mapping grid concentrated on overall admissions policies and procedures although the grid included some references to special admissions.
- 4.33 The panel endorsed the recommendation made by the mapping grid relating to Indicator B2 (reference B2:6 within the grid) that greater detail regarding the constitution and work of the SAP should be made available on the International Programmes website (see also paragraphs 4.25 and 4.26).
- 4.34 The panel also acknowledged and endorsed the mapping group's recommendations concerning the process for appeal against special admissions decisions (Indicator 3, mapping grid references B2:10 and B2:11). These recommendations affirmed the panel's earlier discussions (see paragraphs 4.21, 4.22 and 4.23) regarding a more detailed process for appeals (B2:10 referred to a separate form for this) and the identification of a specific timeframe (B2:11).
- 4.35 With reference to recommendation B2:15 included within the mapping grid, the panel noted that this linked directly to their previous discussions concerning further statistical information regarding the progress of students admitted via the special admissions process (see paragraphs 4.8, 4.16, 4.17 and 4.18).
- 4.36 The panel noted recommendation B2:17 which further emphasised the need for more detailed information on the constitution and remit of the SAP (and the inclusion of this on the website). This mirrored the panel's discussions and suggested recommendation (see paragraph 4.25, 4.26 and 4.33).

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The panel concluded that the thematic review of special admissions across the International Programmes had been a timely and worthwhile undertaking. In particular, a variety of issues spanning administrative and academic considerations had been raised during discussions and the panel advocated that these be discussed further (see specific recommendations and aspects of good practice below).
- 5.2 Overall, the panel agreed that special admissions policies and procedures in operation within the International Programmes were fit for purpose and that decisions were well informed. However, the panel also concurred that consideration of specific issues would serve to further improve the current special admissions procedures (see 'recommendations' below).
- 5.3 The panel expressed slight concern that some key principles and precedents did not appear to be documented appropriately and that this should be addressed. In addition, the panel advocated the reconsideration of these principles and precedents to ensure the continuing fitness for purpose.

- 5.4 The panel also commented that there was a significant amount of activity regarding special admissions within the International Programmes and acknowledged the willingness of colleagues to provide information and discuss ideas for the purposes of the review. However, the panel concluded that although they had been able to complete the review based on documentation provided they would have welcomed more comprehensive and robust data (see also 'recommendations' below).
- 5.5 The panel commented on the positive culture in evidence within the special admissions team. In particular, the helpful, informed, efficient, consistent and transparent approach adopted, coupled with a genuine 'duty of care' ethos, was very encouraging to the panel.

6. COMMENDATIONS AND GOOD PRACTICE

Based on discussions during the meeting, four areas worthy of commendation or relating to good practice were identified:

- (a) The existence and operation of a special admissions policy and practice across the International Programmes. The panel noted that these had been in place for a considerable length of time and fitted well with one of the main aims of the International Programmes regarding widening access to higher education learning opportunities (paragraph 4.4).
- (b) Information available on the International Programmes website concerning special admissions was constructive and informative for prospective students. This had been endorsed by the positive views of students (paragraph 4.28).
- (c) That the website and other sources of information regarding special admissions encouraged prospective applicants (and Institutions) to contact colleagues from the Admissions Team with queries relating to various aspects of their intended application. The panel commended the helpful approach of colleagues associated with handling special admissions (paragraph 4.31).
- (d) That no applicant was 'rejected outright' for the undergraduate programmes and that letters to applicants regarding the outcome of their application were tailored to include information on alternative options with realistic timescales, if applicable. This practice and the timely conveyance of the admissions outcomes (and accompanying guidance) by letter was commended by the panel (paragraph 4.10).

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on discussions during the meeting, recommendations were agreed by the panel as:

- (a) To capture and articulate details of the SAP's constitution, membership, remit and operation. The panel stated that this information should not necessarily reside on the externally facing web pages but should be documented within the International Programmes for the purposes of clarify and reference (paragraphs 4.25, 4.26, 4.33 and 4.36).
- (b) To develop in more detail the appeals process relating to decisions made by the SAP and to apply this to all applications considered by the SAP (i.e. at undergraduate and postgraduate levels). In addition, consideration to be given to adopting a staged approach for SAP appeals to mirror and make use of existing complaints procedures (paragraphs 4.21, 4.22, 4.23 and 4.34).
- (c) To amend the special admissions web pages to include information on the mechanisms in place to support students with particular needs or disabilities. The panel concurred that this information could be usefully added to the section on special admissions to provide details for prospective students from the outset (i.e. at the admissions stage). (See also paragraph 4.30).
- (d) To articulate and document the series of clear precedents used as part of the special admissions decision making process. The panel advocated this codification for practical reasons (for internal recording purposes) and to ensure transparency and consistency regarding special admissions decisions (paragraph 4.27).
- (e) To check current documentation for disparities and anomalies (for example, regarding the number of possible outcomes arising from an application) and to amend this documentation accordingly (paragraphs 4.11 – 4.16).

- (f) To develop the quality and quantity of data regarding special admissions so that this information could be used to monitor the progress (and final achievements) of students admitted via the special admissions process. The panel suggested that collection of more detailed data could be recorded using SITS and reported through the existing APPR procedures (paragraphs 4.8, 4.16, 4.17, 4.18 and 4.35).
- (g) To consider creating and making available case studies about students who had been admitted via the special admissions process and who had gone on to successfully complete their studies (whether at undergraduate or postgraduate level) with the International Programmes. The panel envisaged that such case studies could be used to illustrate the potential opportunities afforded through the International Programmes (paragraph 4.29).

APPENDIX A

Undergraduate Admissions Overview (University of London International Programmes)

Applicants are required to apply on-line for all undergraduate programmes offered by the University of London International programmes. Where necessary, it is possible for admissions staff to submit an application on behalf of a student. Information on how to apply is available at <http://www.londoninternational.ac.uk/applications-and-admissions>. The application deadline is 1 October for most of our programmes and there is usually a non-refundable application handling fee.

Applicants will receive an automated email to let them know that we have received their application. They will also receive a student number which enables us to deal with their application more efficiently. This does not however mean an offer for a place.

Applicants are required to upload appropriately verified documents with their application and a photocopied evidence of their full name and date of birth. Information on the type of verifications we accept is available at <http://www.londoninternational.ac.uk/applications-admissions/how-apply/documentary-evidence-top-page/undergraduate>. It is not possible to upload documents to an application after the application has been submitted.

Documents not uploaded with the online application can be uploaded via the University's online enquiries form http://enquiries.londoninternational.ac.uk/aspx_shared/newuser.aspx or sent to documents@london.ac.uk

Admissions staff will assess whether or not an applicant is eligible for the programme for which they are to be admitted. If an applicant's final results are unknown, the minimum academic standard required would be requested.

All applicants must show acceptable evidence that satisfies the General Entrance Requirement (GER) and any specific Course Requirement (CR) that may be prescribed for the programme on to which they are to be admitted before a formal offer can be issued. All applicants are also expected to have a good level of competence in English.

All applicants must receive a decision within 5 working days.

What happens after we receive an application

Applicants will receive one of the following responses, depending on the documents submitted and information provided in their application:

- Offer Letter: An Offer letter will be sent to the applicant confirming that their application has been approved. This will be followed by two separate emails providing their username and password that will allow applicants to complete the online registration process.
- Provisional Offer Letter: If an applicant meet's our entrance requirements but we have not seen all required documentation, we will issue a Provisional Offer letter. We will then be able to issue an Offer Letter once we have received the required documentation.
- Request for further information: We may request further documentation/information before we can confirm if an applicant meets our entrance requirement.
- Special Admissions Panel (SAP): The decision taken by the Panel following the referral of applications that do not satisfy the University's General and/or Course entrance requirement or the English language requirement.

APPENDIX B

Postgraduate Admissions Overview (University of London International Programmes)

Application

When an applicant applies online they will be issued with a student reference number and they can attach their supporting documentation to the online application. If we do receive an application by post the application will need to be inputted onto SITS by a member of staff and a file is created with the application form and supporting documentation. The system will then send out a confirmation of the application being received with the student reference number to the applicant.

Application Allocated for Processing

All applications that are received online and by post should be allocated for processing within 2 working days to admissions staff.

First decision stage

Admission's staff should take a first decision stage on allocated applications within 2-3 working days. The following decision stages are used depending on the documentation that is provided:

- Applicant receives offer
- Applicant sent initial request for further documentation
- Application referred to the Course Director

Offers

Offers are issued to applicants that satisfy the entrance requirements or have been approved by the Course Director for those that do not. Whilst the majority of applications can be processed and issued an offer by Admissions staff there are some programmes that can only be approved by the Course Director. Applications for these programmes should **always** be referred to the Course Director when all the required documentation has been received.

The following programmes require Course Director approval prior to issuing an offer:

- Applied Education Leadership and Management
- Education and Social Research
- Information Security (unless student holds: An upper second (or equivalent) in a technical subject e.g. maths/computer science/electrical engineering/physics/chemistry/biology etc and is a native English speaker) If student does not meet any of above requirements, then refer to Course Director.
- Petroleum Geoscience
- All failed registered students that are reapplying.

Initial Requests

Initial requests letters are sent to applicants if we require further documentation. The student is normally given a provisional decision when the request is sent out.

Course Director Referrals

Applications are normally referred to the Course Director if the student does not satisfy the general entrance requirements or for programmes that have Course Director only approval.

APPENDIX C

Special Admissions Procedures (University of London International Programmes)

1. Overview of Admissions Process

The application process

Once a prospective student has applied to undertake one of the programmes offered by the International Programmes an email is issued to confirm receipt of the application. A student number will also be issued to enable the applicant, Admissions Team and other colleagues to deal with the application more efficiently. However, provision of the student number does not indicate that the applicant has been offered a place.

Applicants receive an acknowledgement by email within 24 hours that their application has been received.

Decisions on applications

For 'straightforward' applications the Admissions Team aims to issue one of four responses to applicants, within two working days of receiving an application. For more 'complicated' applications the Admissions Team aims to issue one of four responses to applicants, within five working days of receiving the application. The type of response provided will vary, depending on the information provided by the applicant. The four options are listed below (all correspondence is sent by email):

(i) Application is approved

An offer letter telling the applicant that their application has been accepted is issued. To become a student the next step is for the applicant to complete the online registration process and to pay course/module fees. Information about how to go about these is included in this response to the applicant with details of the corresponding deadlines.

(ii) Application is provisionally approved

The applicant will need to supply documentary evidence of their qualifications before the Admissions Team can make a final offer. Once this has been received the Admissions Team will aim to respond with an offer letter within one working day.

(iii) More information and/or documentary evidence is required

An email is sent to the applicant to ask for this information so that a decision can be made on the application. Once the required evidence/information has been received the Admissions Team aims to respond with a decision within two - five working days (depending on the 'straightforwardness' of the application).

(iv) Applicant may not meet the entry requirements

In this instance the application will be referred to the 'Special Admissions Panel' for a final decision. The Special Admissions Panel considers all aspects of applications, including qualifications, relevant work experience and reasons for study. The Admissions Team will aim to send the decision within three working days from the date of notifying the applicant that their application has been referred to the Special Admissions Panel for consideration

2. Qualifications for entry

(i) Undergraduate

When assessing and comparing overseas qualifications to UK qualifications the Admission Team follows the advice of UK NARIC.

Successful applicants applying to one of the International Programmes full first degrees (e.g. / BA / BSc / LLB) or Diploma of Higher Education programmes must normally satisfy:

- General Entrance Requirements (category G within the Qualifications for Entrance Schedule) and
- specific programme requirements where applicable (e.g. Mathematics competency) and
- English language requirements.

Those applying to one of our lower awards (e.g. Certificate of Higher Education), must normally:

- hold qualifications at least equivalent to UK GCSE standard grade C or above (category O within our Qualifications for Entrance Schedule) and
- satisfy specific programme requirements (e.g. Mathematics competency) and
- satisfy English language requirements.

Those applying to one of our Diploma for Graduate programmes are advised to visit the Requirements section of the web page (relating to the applicant's chosen programme) before submitting an application.

The Admissions Team recognises that there are a few countries missing from the Qualifications for Entrance Schedule. This does not mean that qualifications from these countries are unacceptable only it is not possible to publish the requirements due to more than one grading system operating within the country in question. Applicants holding school leaving (or other) qualification(s) from a country that is not listed are advised to contact the Admissions Team prior to submitting an application.

Where possible, based on information provided by the applicant, the University will always try and advise an applicant on eligibility prior to submitting a formal application. However, due to the increase in workload this advice is not provided between 1 September and 30 October of each year.

(ii) Postgraduate

Those applying to one of the International Programmes postgraduate programmes (Masters / Postgraduate Diplomas / Postgraduate Certificates) or Postgraduate Individual Modules are advised to visit the Requirements section of the web pages relating to their chosen programme before submitting an application as entrance requirements vary. This includes academic, English language and work experience requirements.

When assessing and comparing overseas qualifications to UK qualifications the Admission Team follows the advice of UK NARIC.

Following set precedent, some Lead Colleges allow the Admissions Team to take decisions on eligibility without referral. If the Admissions Team is unable to approve the applicant for one of their programmes (this includes alternative entry awards such as a Postgraduate Certificate) then the application is referred to the Programme Director for consideration. The Programme Director will consider academic and professional qualifications, as well as relevant work experience. If approved for a programme then the Admissions Team will send an offer by email. If the application is unsuccessful then the applicant is informed of this.

A number of postgraduate programmes have their own Qualifications for Entrance Schedule (for example the Postgraduate Laws Qualifications for Entrance). These schedules have been designed (within set precedent) for programmes where the Lead College has given the Admissions Team permission to take decisions on eligibility without referral. These schedules are published online. The countries listed within these schedules are those where the university has received at least 10 applications from the 2013/14 and 2014/15 academic years.

Other Lead Colleges want all of their applications referred to them for consideration before any decision on eligibility is taken. When referring these applications the Admissions Team will advise the Programme Director on the status and comparability of an applicant's qualifications.

Please note the Admissions Team does not process applications to programmes that are led by SOAS. These are directly processed by SOAS.

3. Special Admissions Process (for undergraduate programmes)

Applicants who are not automatically eligible will be individually considered by the University of London's 'Special Admissions Panel'. The Special Admissions Panel will consider qualifications which are not published under the Qualifications for Entrance Schedule, incomplete qualifications (e.g. diplomas / degrees) and substantial relevant work experience. The Special Admissions Panel follows set precedent which has been made by the relevant Lead College (for example if an applicant has applied to a BSc EMFSS degree then the panel will follow precedent that has been set by the LSE). Therefore in context the Special Admissions Panel does not make decisions, it follows set precedent.

The Admissions Team has adopted a 'Lean' approach to processing Special Admissions applications. The Special Admissions Panel no longer meets once a week to assess applications. Decisions are processed on a 'rolling' basis by the Special Admissions Coordinator.

If an applicant is aged below 21 then they must fully satisfy general entrance (work experience cannot be considered).

If an applicant is aged 21 or above then they are considered a 'Mature Applicant'. This means they can be admitted on the basis of 'reduced entry' (for example 1 GCE A level at grade C instead of 2 GCE A levels at grade E). Furthermore relevant work experience can also be considered.

Regardless of age, programme specific (such as Mathematics) and English language requirements must always be fully satisfied.

'Special Admissions Office Approvals': when an applicant is aged 21 or above and clearly meets the universities 'Mature Entry' criteria then the application is not referred to the Special Admissions Panel. The application is fast tracked through the system and an offer is sent to the applicant. These applications receive a 'Special Admissions Approval Code' which is recorded on SITS (the same group of codes which are used for an applicant if they are referred to the Special Admissions Panel and subsequently approved for their chosen programme).

'Straightforward' applications are processed by the Special Admissions Coordinator without consultation. For example if an applicant is aged below 21 and has applied to the LLB degree with only GCSE / GCE O levels then they must obtain 2 UK GCE A levels (or an acceptable equivalent) before meeting the entrance requirements.

For more 'complicated' applications the Special Admissions Coordinator will consult with Senior Admissions Managers for advice and agreement before processing the decision.

When the Admissions Team is unable to / unsure of a decision then the application is referred to the relevant Programme Director from the Lead College. When referring the Special Admissions Coordinator will provide full details of the application to the Programme Director.

The Admissions Team does not make decisions on relevant work experience. If an applicant would like to be considered on the basis of relevant work experience then the application is referred to the Programme Director of the Lead College for consideration.

The Special Admissions Panel will notify the applicant with one of the following five decisions:

- Application has been approved for their chosen programme. An offer letter is sent in the usual way
- Application has been conditionally approved for their chosen programme. A conditional offer letter is sent to the applicant informing them of the condition. This will either be they are required to successfully complete a pending qualification or they are required to submit some outstanding evidence
- Application has been approved for an alternative award. For example this is where an applicant might apply for the BA English degree but only meet the entrance requirements for the Certificate of Higher Education in English. An offer letter (for the Cert HE) will be sent to the applicant along with an explanation of the decision
- Application has been conditionally approved for an alternative award. This is when the applicant only meets the entrance requirements for an alternative award (for example Certificate of Higher Education) provided they pass a pending / submit evidence of a further qualification
- Further study required to become eligible

An important aspect of the service provided by the Admissions Team is to give advice to applicants who do not satisfy the entrance requirements for admission to their chosen programme. The Special Admissions Panel gives advice to each applicant on which qualification(s) they must pass in order for an offer of registration to be made. If the applicants take and pass the qualification(s) specified within a three-year period they have a guaranteed offer of registration for the programme to which they have applied.

4. Admissions appeal process (including Special Admissions)

The University is committed to ensuring all decisions taken by the Admissions Team are clear, transparent and in-line with set precedent.

Applicants who wish to appeal against a decision must state the basis of the appeal and include any additional information such as further complete/incomplete qualifications or work reference(s) that were not submitted with the original application.

All appeals are referred to the Programme Director of the Lead College for consideration.

Providing that no additional evidence is required, the Admissions Team will aim to respond to an appeal with a reviewed decision within ten working days.