Our Future Student Services

Purpose of the review

1. This review arises from the College's strategic aim to enrich the student experience and enhance our portfolio of student support services. There are a range of services and means of delivery that enable students to achieve excellence as part of our academic community. Recently, across the sector, there has been a wide range of innovations and enhancements in the organisation and delivery of the portfolio of services in place to support students.

2. These drivers, and the wider programme at Imperial to promote operational excellence, mean that it is timely for the College to take a holistic view of how best to organise, develop, communicate and enhance the related professional services that support students.

3. The terms of reference and remit of the review were agreed by Provost's Board in June 2015, with the intention that an initial report should be presented to VPAGE for review, prior to submission to Provost's Board at the end of the year.

Terms of reference and membership

4. A panel of staff, drawn from across the College and working in partnership with Imperial College Union (ICU), was asked to propose a vision for the future delivery of student services, considering the aspirations and preferences of students as service users, identifying potential benchmarks from within the sector, and beyond, that are clear proponents of excellence in the delivery of user-focussed services. This should:

- Enable students to access appropriate, accurate and consistent information, advice and guidance in a timely manner via a range of means
- Include all our current campuses and a future model for the White City campus
- Support students through their transitions from pre-application to post graduation
- Establish expectations of service delivery including respect, sensitivity and developing rapport
- Identify key measures of impact
- Identify potential implications for governance and accountability
- Take due regard of the QAA Quality Code[1] Competitions & Markets Authority guidance
- Suggest priorities for change over the next 2-3 years

Tom Welton (Chair)	Dean of Natural Sciences
Chris Banks	Director of Library Services
Liz Bromley (external member)	Registrar and Secretary, Goldsmiths College
Toby Emmerson	Employer Relations Executive, Business School
Richard Martin	Faculty Operating Officer, Engineering
Mark Nelson	Professor of Human Immunodeficiency Virology Medicine
Phil Power	Education Manager, Faculty of Engineering
Lucinda Sandon-Allum	ICU President
Jennifer Watson	ICU Deputy President (Welfare)
Jo Ivison (Panel Secretary)	EA to the Vice-Provost (Education)

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[1] Section B3, B4 and Chapter C

Method of working

5. The work of the panel has addressed the above terms of reference and was informed by discussion with, and evidence from, the various stakeholders as well as an ==analysis of best practice from across the sector (have we covered this aspect sufficiently?).== The services in scope (please see Annex A) each provided written information about their current service provision and their future plans, as well as the challenges and opportunities that they foresee.

Key findings

6. Through discussion with service providers, visiting facilities and reviewing the evidence submitted, the panel encountered a universal commitment to providing an excellent service and several areas of outstanding practice. However, this commitment was often tested by a lack of cohesion between the service providers, limited management capability in some areas and wide variation in the profile that particular areas of support have amongst students and academic departments.

7. The panel's findings have been grouped as follows:

    a. Cross-cutting issues: those that apply broadly across several service areas and where further work is needed in order to identify and agree appropriate solutions; and
    b. Specific areas to address: where an issue local to a particular service has been identified and rapid action needs to and/or can be taken.

8. Cross-cutting issues:

    a. *Communications and marketing.* No communication or marketing uniformity exists across the range of support services, the use of a consistent brand is absent. The value placed on proactively communicating with the student body by individual services was mixed. The review group observed instances of good practice in this area (in particular Campus Services and ICU) but these were correlated with the service provider's ability to access dedicated professional support for communications and marketing. Many services rely on their website and word of mouth for the majority of their communication activities, with little use of social media or a proactive approach. The new student space webpages were considered to be a positive step forward collating information about support services to one place online. The character of some services being confidential at the point of delivery in some cases leads to hesitation in proactively communicating their existence. Communication between services is variable, with considerable reliance placed on formal committee meetings. Tension between different services was evident from the meetings, in particular between the Student Hub, Registry and Student Finance, though all services noted the situation was improving.

    b. *Management and administrative capability.* There is a lack of formal integration in smaller service areas (in particular the wellbeing-related services) with potential opportunities for the sharing of management and administrative resources being missed. Often senior practitioners are heavily engaged in activities outside their specialism, reducing their capacity to undertake and direct student casework. The absence of a common approach to data sharing and use of IT was apparent across nearly all services. A plethora of IT systems are currently used in the services reviewed and in one instance a reliance on a paper system remains.

The range of approaches imposes considerable limitations on the College's ability to report consistent usage data for the various services or identify students seeking assistance from multiple services. Furthermore responsibilities for students aged under 18 are inadequately understood.

c. *Location of facilities.* The majority of student support services are spread across various floors at the western end of the Sherfield Building. Service providers reported frequent instances of students struggling to locate them and of a lack of privacy when waiting to book or attend appointments for sensitive matters (such as with the Counselling and Disability Services). This physical dislocation also reduces opportunities for operational efficiencies and communication across the various services. In general, the absence of a contiguous, clearly sign-posted and easily accessible centre for student support services places the College at a disadvantage when compared to many of its competitor institutions.

d. *Provision beyond South Kensington campus.* With the exception of the Library the range of in-person services available at other campuses is minimal. Considering the number of students at the Silwood Park Campus, the services provided there are adequate. Many services reported challenges offering their services at other campus, in particular in locating adequate space. A number of services are either considering or trialling providing their services by phone or online to complement in-person appointments. Some services offered by the Student Hub require students to visit South Kensington which is an undesirable situation, it was noted that with staffed libraries at all campuses provision of certain Student Hub services could be offered through the Library. Generally, service providers had given little consideration to the   following: offering their services near to where students live; offering services outside of core teaching hours; or developing aspirations for the White City Campus.

e. *Engagement with academic departments.* Interaction between support services and academic departments is very mixed. Good relationships do exist but these are far from consistent and often rely on single individuals. No consistent approach exists for how the support services (in particular the wellbeing services) brief and interact with key staff in departments. Furthermore there is no common agreement as to how referrals between departments and between services are enacted on a practical basis, with little reference to any protocol. The current situation presents an area of risk for the College if students are unable to access appropriate support services at the appropriate time. It was noted by the review group that Personal Tutors and Supervisors are often engaged in initial conversations with students who may wish to use one of the College's support services. Ensuring that Personal Tutors and Supervisors are equipped with up-to-date information regarding services and protocols is of considerable importance.

f. *Provision for postgraduates.* Many of the services reviewed have no overarching need to offer distinct services to postgraduates. The main observation of the review group is that many of the support service providers '*think-undergraduate*' when planning, communicating and delivering their services. Many services are unable to distinguish their users between undergraduates and postgraduates. In essence this is a cultural matter - addressing the other cross-cutting issues in this section with the needs of both undergraduates and postgraduates reflected should rectify the group's observations.

g. *Staff training and development.* A relatively common theme amongst service leaders was a variable approach to, and importance placed on, training and

development opportunities, both for themselves and their staff. The range of specialist organisations of which our services have membership are limited when compared to other institutions in the sector - this limits access to specialist development opportunities and sector good practice. The most common reason identified for this was cost.

9.   Specific areas to address:

   a.   *The role of College Tutor.* The role of the College Tutor at Imperial is very broad, seemingly without boundaries, and without a clear remit. The College is jeopardising its reputation, and its legal good standing, by not addressing such an important part of its support structures against appropriate consumer expectations. A full analysis of the concerns identified by the panel is provided at Annex B.

   b.   *Pre-arrival and induction activities.* The College's approach to pre-arrival and induction activities is mixed, with a number of services offering different activities. Limiting the College's main pre-arrival activities for international students to only 300 new undergraduates was seen as unnecessarily restrictive and potentially damaging to the College's reputation. There is reasonable support within the student body for a "*week zero*" for new undergraduates free of teaching, which could provide an opportunity for more induction and settling-in activities.

   c.   *Accommodation services.* When consulting with students it was apparent that there is a perceived lack of transparency regarding how students' preferences are used in the allocation of rooms in undergraduate halls of residence. There is also a desire for more support for postgraduate students new to London who wish to live outside the College's GradPad portfolio.

   d.   *Capacity for student counselling.* Many individuals have commented to the review group that the capacity for student counselling does not meet the demand, in particular at certain points in the year. The number of student counsellors has increased considerably in the past five years, and the reported national trends are that more students are seeking counselling support during their time at university. In parallel to the cross-cutting issues, specific work should be undertaken to understand the demand for student counselling and consider the operating model.

   e.   *Role of the Students' Union.* The services offered by the Students' Union are distinct to those offered by the College, in particular the Union offers advocacy for students on academic, financial and housing issues, together with way-pointing to other services offered by the College. It was noted that communications from the College services should state that students can seek alternative advice from the students' union, and *vice versa.* The Union reported that it had created a number of additional staff roles over the summer to support volunteering and further advice work, which were being funded from reserves and are not currently funded in the long term. This is an area of risk, should the Union be unable to secure permanent funding for these activities.

   f.   *Social activities offered by International Student Support.* In recent years, the International Student Support team have started offering a range of social activities for international students. Consideration should be given as to whether this activity could be better suited to being offered by the students' union which would offer opportunities for interaction with their portfolio of existing activities.

g. *Accessibility.* A number of services reported challenges with regards to ensuring their spaces are accessible. Consideration should be given to undertaking an accessibility audit.

h. *Condition of Chaplaincy facilities.* The Chaplaincy facilities are housed in 10 Prince's Gardens. The review group identified the Chaplaincy prayer rooms in particular as in urgent need of refreshing.

i. *Study skills provision.* The College offers an abundance of study skills training opportunities, delivered by a number of the services under review and others. A review of the College's study skills provision should be undertaken to identify how best training in this area should be facilitated and how opportunities should be communicated to students.

j. *Services post-graduation.* A number of the services under review offer access to alumni with various challenges being encountered in particular around IT systems. It is recommended that Advancement consider the specific findings of the review group in this area and work with the appropriate services offering access to alumni.

Recommendations

10. Actions to address the issues set out above are set out in the table below.

Issue	Recommended action
1. Communications and marketing	a. Instigate a consistent brand for all support services b. Initiate a systematic approach to student communications with opportunities for individual services to access professional communications and marking support c. Start a process of regular inter-service communication
2. Management and administrative capability	a. Apply operational excellence rapid improvement process to the Wellbeing functions (which can also help determine systems support required). b. Review sharing of administrative and management resources between services c. Instigate a common approach to reporting of usage data
3. Location of facilities	a. Consider how more of the services could be brought together in one common location. b. Consideration should be given to how the opportunity brought about by the refurbishment of the Main Library could be utilised for this
4. Provision beyond South Kensington	a. Consider whether the campus Library staff could provide some Student Hub services b. Prioritise developing services to offer appointments online and by-phone c. Develop a plan for how student services are to be offered at the White City Campus
5. Engagement with academic departments	a. Approve a referral protocol b. Review wellbeing services training for personal tutors and supervisors
6. Provision for postgraduates	a. Consider further training for service providers regarding the College's postgraduate offering

7. Staff training and development	a. Review access to management training for service leaders b. Join relevant external organisations
8. The role of College Tutor	a. The role and remit of College Tutors should be reviewed urgently in line with the steps set out at Annex B
9. Pre-arrival and induction activities	a. Investigate the feasibility of establishing a "*week zero*" for new undergraduates free of teaching, which could provide an opportunity for more induction and settling-in activities
10. Accommodation services	a. Provide greater transparency of the process by which students' preferences are used in the allocation of rooms in undergraduate halls of residence b. Investigate what further support could be provided to postgraduate students new to London
11. Capacity for student counselling	a. Understand the demand for student counselling and consider the appropriate operating model in order to provide this
12. Role of the Students' Union	a. Improve cross-referencing of services between College and Students' Union services b. Others?
13. Social activities offered by International Student Support	a. Consideration should be given as to whether this activity could be better suited to being offered by the students' union
14. Accessibility	a. Consideration should be given to undertaking an accessibility audit of student support services
15. Condition of Chaplaincy facilities	a. The Chaplaincy prayer rooms at 10 Prince's Gardens are in urgent need of refurbishment
16. Study skills provision	a. A review of the College's study skills provision should be undertaken to identify how best training in this area should be facilitated and how opportunities should be communicated to students
17. Services post-graduation	a. The panel should liaise with Advancement to understand the services currently offered to alumni, the challenges that this can entail to service providers, and identify any future services that it would be desirable to provide

Quick wins

11. Info to follow from Toby Emmerson – if not included in "Recommendations" above.

Next steps

12. These recommendations are presented to VPAGE for review and, if appropriate, endorsement, prior to submission to the Provost's Board.

Who is responsible for taking forward the approved recommendations?

November 2015

DRAFT

Annex A

Scope of services included in the review (Jo – please could you check?)

Academic Registry
Student Finance
Disability Advisory Service
Counselling and Wellbeing Service
Student Hub – Campus Services
Chaplaincy
Careers services
Director of Student Support
College Tutors
Library Services
ICT Service Desk and related education services
ICU Student Advice Centre
ICU Volunteering

The panel met with the following service providers

(Jo – please could you add?)

Name and role	Service area
Gerry Greyling, Senior Assistant Registrar	Academic Registry
Etc	

Annex B: College Tutors

The role of the College Tutor at Imperial is very broad, seemingly without boundaries, and without a clear remit. Recruitment, training, monitoring and quality assurance processes of the function are not apparent. The role is being fulfilled by extremely willing and positive people, who have an abundance of experience of working at Imperial. The Tutors are drawn from retired staff, who seem to recommend each other for the job, so their knowledge of current practice has the potential to be limited, although they state that 'training isn't necessary because of their experience'. The roles seem to depend on knowing people and processes (presumably current during the Tutors' time of employment), and it is felt that this level of engagement remains sufficient for them to deliver a good student support service. They maintain that they are 'supposed to know the ropes', to interact with everyone in the College, and therefore have more to offer than newer staff.

The Tutors describe themselves as managing 'the fiddly and complicated stuff' and seem committed to 'avoiding the formal procedure if possible'. They are hampered in their effectiveness by being 'not necessarily able to put a bomb under people because they don't know what we do'. There is much to be said for informal resolution of matters where possible, but there is also risk attached if this happens in an unstructured way and outside of a recognised framework.

The Tutors seem to have little awareness of how things might have changed/be changing and have no clear channel for how changes are communicated to them. This creates weakness in terms of practice – when dealing with sensitive student welfare or behavioural matters, the latest internal policy, and awareness of external good/best practice is essential. The roles are contractually part time, as little as 0.2 FTE / one day a week, but the Tutors relate an apparent College expectation of extraordinary commitment and flexibility, including being accessible out of hours if needed. Access to the out of hours cover is through a 'generic email'. This is poor practice when matters of a personal, traumatic, sensitive, and possibly criminal nature might be involved. It also creates a weakness in the system in that certain actions taken by the Tutors have the potential to be deemed beyond their contract. This raises questions of legal liability and professional indemnity which should be investigated urgently.

An account was given of a Tutor giving support to a female student alleging sexual harassment. The narrative revealed that the student was under 18. The Tutors seemed unclear about the College's Safeguarding Policy, or who is the Safeguarding Officer. This raises very serious questions about how the College is managing what might be a quite significant proportion of its population which is subject to the under-18 safeguarding duty of care. The potential reputational risks to the College, (as well as the risks of harm to the individual child), of an apparent systemic ignorance of legally required safeguarding duties are very serious. Furthermore, the risks to individual victims of sexual attack, or any other such personal trauma, are also significant if there is a lack of appropriate professional care and support. The Tutors explain that they are there 'in part to give reassurance'. They also express anxiety about the rise in the number of students with serious mental health issues.

Well-meaning amateurs, even with years of experience and common sense, are simply not able to access the appropriate mechanisms for victim support in times of crisis, or mental health issues, and consequently cannot be expected 'to give reassurance'. Worryingly, they describe taking advice on procedure from 'a member of security staff who used to be a Met policeman' – this is a quite unacceptable route for advice on so many levels, including confidentiality, internal policy, conflict of interest, and sensitivity to reputational damage. They describe a lack of dedicated space in which to hear students' accounts of their issues – there is a seeming contradiction in the expectation that the Tutors can deal with the most

serious incidents, but no appropriate space or privacy is offered to them to deliver this service.

The College Tutors, whilst cognisant of the Counselling Service, and other available student facing services, are not systematically networked into the formal support structures, operating instead on local and personal knowledge and the use of phone calls. In the present world in which students are recognised (and protected) in law as consumers of the services offered by HEIs, the College is jeopardising its reputation, and its legal good standing, by not addressing such important support structures against appropriate consumer expectations.

The College Tutors describe their roles as engaged with the management of student complaints, against the College, against each other, and against staff, and student disciplinary matters which might or might not be related to complaints received. The Tutor role seems to offer a combination of defence, prosecution, judge and jury – as well as witness protection. This presents a massive conflict of interest for the individual College Tutor, and also reflects badly on the College's process management. A complaint making its way to the OIA which started out in this apparently/potentially muddled way would be likely to end badly for the College.

Given the loyalty of the Tutors to the College, and the experience and common sense which is undoubtedly theirs, a better way forward for them in a Future Student Services might well be to make the role advisory in terms of signposting to the appropriate formal services, **or** could be limited to hearing complaints, appeals, informal grievances and so forth which would have significantly less damage potential, and would have to conform to the College's prescribed processes. Whatever their future, they should be subject to clear recruitment processes, based on competence as well as personal enthusiasm; they should receive the training required to do their job effectively, they should be well networked into the permanent support structures and their work should be monitored regularly for quality assurance.