

Paper being circulated widely to staff and students of the College for consultation prior to discussion at College Committee on 28 November and at Academic Board on 29 November

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

Use of Degree Awarding Powers

1. In July 2006 the Privy Council notified the College that its application for powers to award its own degrees had been successful, the proposed amendments to the College Charter having been approved. From the date of that notification the College has had the authority under its Charter to award degrees at undergraduate and taught and research postgraduate levels. This advance followed a College-wide effort, with the full backing of Academic Board and Council, to convince first the Quality Assurance Agency and then the Privy Council that King's should have these powers.
2. When contemplating an application for degree-awarding powers some three years ago the College's intention was to hold such powers in reserve and to continue to make awards under the delegated degree-awarding powers of the University of London. However, in the interim the political landscape within the University was changed considerably. Moreover, in the meantime the College has adopted an increasingly robust approach to its own identity and academic objectives. It is the view of the Principal's Central Team – subject to the current consultation – that in these new circumstances it makes sense for the College to move to use its newly acquired degree-awarding powers.
3. During academic year 2004-5, in response to a consultation on the future of the University, the College's response stated that it envisaged a radically reformed University with the constituent colleges playing a major role in its governance. While this was the majority view, there was a feeling in some quarters that there might be no future for the University (and in fact Imperial College is in the final stages of withdrawal from it). Unease with current arrangements was heightened by the publication, during 2005-6, of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) report on the central University which declared that the agency had "limited confidence", in contrast to the institutional audits of the colleges in which the QAA declared "broad confidence".

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4. These debates have not diminished the feeling of King's, or of the large majority of Colleges, that a radically reformed University of London has a valuable future role, not least through the Senate House Library, the research institutes of the School of Advanced Study and the intercollegiate halls of residence. Indeed, the University's viability has been reinforced by proposals – now accepted in principle by the University Council - which envisage a much enhanced role for the Colleges in the governance of the University. However, within these discussions the feeling has grown that in the reformed structure the Colleges should be able, while remaining in full membership of the University, to exercise degree awarding powers, i.e. to award their own degrees. This position has been endorsed in principle, as a development which will serve to strengthen the University and its colleges, by the University's Heads of Colleges Committee following clarification of a range of "technical issues" arising out of the University's Statutes and Ordinances.

5. This proposition will be considered by the University Council on 6th December when it considers further the emerging proposals for constitutional reform. The Council will also have before it applications for use of the powers from UCL, LSE, the Institute of Education (subject to that College's final acquisition of degree-awarding powers) and – subject to this consultation and subsequent discussion at College Committee, Academic Board and Council – King's.

6. King's has been at the forefront of the devolution of degree-awarding powers by the University to its constituent colleges. More than fifteen years ago the College was the first to hold its own graduation ceremonies for the award of University of London degrees, and was the first (from September 2006) to draw down powers to conduct research degree examinations. More importantly, the acquisition and potential use of powers to award the College's own degrees is consistent with the College's greater sense of self-determination and its stronger feeling of identity as embodied in the emerging Strategic Plan. Here the clear objective is for the College to step up from truly excellent to outstanding, thereby becoming a world class institution which is recognised as such.

7. Thus the College needs to come to a view rapidly on the exercise of its degree awarding powers. The following issues may impact on this decision:

- the delivery of the curriculum would remain unchanged as only the awarding institution would change;
- where programmes are presented by a number of colleges such as the "federal" BA in Philosophy, there would need to be an agreement between them for the future. It is entirely possible that the award would remain as that of the University of London though the administration would not remain with the Senate House;

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- where programmes are presented jointly with another institution outside the University of London, discussions would be held with the partner institutions as to whether the award remains jointly with the University or whether it transfers to the College;
- where degrees would be awarded by the College the degree certificate would make plain that King's College London is a constituent college of the University of London (this would meet the continued resonance of the University for international postgraduate students; survey and anecdotal evidence suggests that most King's students pay little attention to the College's membership of the University of London and that at least some already expect to receive a degree of King's College London);
- as the College would remain within the University of London the importance of the University's brand for international (and to a lesser extent other) student recruitment would be retained;
- transitional arrangements would deal with the position of students already on course at the time the change was implemented;
- the College would plan to award its own undergraduate, postgraduate (including research), higher and honorary degrees;
- if the College determines to award its own degrees then certain things would need to change, e.g. it would be responsible for the production of degree certificates and would need to design its own academic dress, but the majority of arrangements would remain unaltered such as the regulatory framework, the system of Programme and School Boards of Examiners, schemes for the award of honours and the appointment of Visiting Examiners.

8. Given that the picture which is emerging for the future structure of the University is one of a federation of colleges, each exercising their own degree-awarding powers – virtually all the colleges of the University are at some stage in the application process – a decision by the King's to exercise its own degree awarding-powers would be entirely consonant with this as well as with the College's own trajectory. It is known that both LSE and UCL intend to exercise their own degree-awarding powers.

9. The intention is to ask Academic Board, at its meeting on 29 November, to support an application by the College to the University Council to exercise its degree-awarding powers while remaining in membership of the University of London. It is also intended to ask the Board to approve a plan for the College to award degrees in its own right for all new students entering King's from the 2007-08 academic year. If Academic Board approves these policies, they would be submitted to College Council at its meeting on 12 December 2006.

10. Comments may be sent by 28 November to Brian Salter at brian.salter@kcl.ac.uk. They may also be sent to heads of School and of major administrative units prior to that date, when College Committee will discuss these issues.

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