Reference Group Report
As part of the preparations for the Academic Restructure, a reference group was created to discuss how best to provide administrative support to the six new schools. Membership was open to every Head of Department and Department Manager, as well as to a representative of the Students Union. The group looked at a different theme each time, ranging from the underlying principles of where and how services should be delivered to practical questions like the ideal layout of a school office. The Reference group has met four times and contributed numerous insights and suggestions for the future shape of school administration. Below is a note from Caroline Beck, Director of Student Administration which covers the four sessions completed so far.

“The first session reassured us that the list of 80 core services and the subject-specific services we had identified seem to encompass all the services delivered by academic administration. It was most helpful to learn more about the department-specific elements involved and the differences in how they are currently delivered between departments. There were a couple of additional suggestions that we are in the process of looking into, such as the admin support for departments who deliver programmes in central London.

It was also very encouraging to hear the level of support and enthusiasm during the second session for the changes proposed to the delivery of certain services in the new structure. It was equally important for us to capture your thoughts on the potential risks and dependencies associated with these changes, and we will be considering all of these as we move forward.

Both sessions involved a lot of discussion about the wide variety of ways in which different processes and services are currently being delivered across departments. This information will be particularly useful when we begin the task of mapping the changes to all Academic Administrative services in greater detail. This will facilitate the transition from ‘as is’ to ‘to be’ and ensure that we do not lose important knowledge as we transform.

Of the concerns and questions raised, many seemed to be linked to an overarching concern around whether central and school admin teams will be sufficiently resourced to deliver the new service structure, and whether both students and academics will be adequately supported. As detailed previously, we have begun work considering what the structure of a School Administration Team will need to look like, and have started to build a workload/resource model so that we can create staffing structures that are appropriate for the size and complexity of each individual school. This model is still a work in progress and will continue to be reviewed following the feedback received now and during the formal consultation stages so that we are confident that the appropriate level of resource is allocated across Academic Administration.

Reference Group 3 was a useful session focusing on the proposed staffing structure and workload model approach. In response to the comments made, we will be making a number of amendments to the staff structure model, such as including the links to the TOMs and Heads of Departments as well as the Head of School on the model. We will also look to better define the position and role of the Student & Programme Administration Manager and what the ‘School Administration’ function encompasses. Feedback relating to the embedded partner roles will be passed onto Robert Hall who will be running the working group for this area, including a need for service level agreements and suggestions for additional services to be included.

We will also be incorporating your feedback on the workload factors, including adding the complexity of assessments as a factor when calculating the overall programme complexity. There were a few requests to see and feedback on the full detail of the proposed workload model in due course and this will form part of the more formal processes to be held in the New Year.
Reference Group 4 was another valuable session with very interesting discussions taking place around the practicalities of the operating model, particularly the office layout and opening hours. We will be making a few changes to the admin hub model following the feedback, such as the proximity of Head of School office to admin hub and flexible desk arrangements depending on the space, e.g. clusters of desks rather than rows. There were also a few additional requirements suggested that will be included in upcoming discussions with Estates, such as additional meeting space(s) for staff, sufficient storage space for both day-to-day and archiving requirements, particular workstation requirements, as well as access to pantry facilities. The discussions around opening hours also raised several key considerations to be included as we develop the new service delivery model, including peaks and troughs in demand, sufficient support and cover, email management, collation of stats and availability of other professional service teams.

Overall the Reference Group has been invaluable and we greatly appreciate everyone’s time and input into the Group. As previously indicated we will be putting the Reference Group on hold whilst formal processes take place, however, we will look to relaunch the Reference Group to support the next steps in implementing the School structure administratively later in spring 2019.”