

Official sundial unveiling – Thursday 12 June 2008

Transcript of speech given by Professor Jonathan Kydd, Dean of the University of London External System

Presently the External System operates in more than 180 countries, offering more than 100 different study programmes. It is a partnership with 13 Colleges of the University, which provide the academic direction.

The External System includes a group of 185 staff who work directly for the Central University, supporting the student life cycle, reviewing quality and developing policy and pedagogy. But the phrase 'External System' encompasses a much larger number of academics and learning and teaching specialists in the 13 Colleges who work as examiners, developers of courses and learning materials, as teachers and as encouragers and helpers of the many overseas organisations which support our students. The system is crucially dependent on the engagement of this large and diffuse group of colleagues, and we're very grateful to them and to their Colleges for their enthusiastic support.

The Colleges of the University are the bedrock of our academic standards. All students of the External System are assessed to the same standards as internal students registered at a College. All examination papers are sat in country but are couriered to London and assessed by academics of the University, so we are in no way a franchising operation. The Quality Assurance Agency reviewed us in 2006 and placed us in the highest possible category: "broad confidence".

Something of the worldwide relevance of the University of London External System can be glimpsed by mentioning the eclectic group of countries or regions which represent our top 20 markets (out of 180):

Singapore, Hong Kong, UK, Trinidad and Tobago, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, USA, Sri Lanka, Canada, Mauritius, UAE, Jamaica, Nigeria, India, Russia, Kenya, Malta, Germany, Japan.

This demonstrates our relevance in highly developed as well as developing countries; in smaller island economies as well the huge land masses of USA, Canada and Russia. It gives me pleasure and comfort that our fastest growing

markets tend to be in very distinct and very important parts of the world, to pick just three examples: Russia, West Africa, South Asia.

As Bill Rammell said at the London launch of our 150th Anniversary, the External System has been a pioneer in the field of flexible and distance education. And he attributed its immense success over 150 years to an ability to look forward continuously, and reinvent itself when necessary. I believe that what the Minister said is absolutely true.

In summary, there are a number of features of the University of London External System which are unique in the world. It is highly flexible; relatively open at the enrolment stage; accessible because of its very reasonable fees which in turn stem from a large organisation with economies of scale and a tradition of tight cost control; much engaged with institution building in other countries (historically and presently – and able to know when to let go); prepared to take well-judged risks – on occasion this means backing people of vision who are starting things up in difficult circumstances; and, most important of all, it is a route to qualifications which are recognised in the UK and internationally to be of the highest standards.