



**QAA**

**Outcomes from institutional audit**  
**Academic and personal advice,**  
**guidance and support for students**  
**(including postgraduate research**  
**students)**  
**Second series**



**Sharing good practice**

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## Summary

Consideration of the 59 institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006 shows that, in general, institutions have established effective arrangements to provide academic guidance, support and supervision, and personal support and guidance for students, including for those pursuing postgraduate research programmes.

Features of good practice relating to this topic were identified in more than two-thirds of the audit reports, and in over a quarter of the reports there were two or more such features. Particular strengths were identified in: the commitment and effectiveness of staff in providing academic and personal support; the support provided for postgraduate research students; the development of study, transferable and other skills; and the coordination and overall quality of student support.

Recommendations for action to improve academic and personal support appeared in less than one-third of the audit reports. Among other matters these recommendations related to: the consistency with which student support (including personal tutor support) is provided within institutions; the need for a strategic approach to personal development planning (PDP); and the support provided for particular categories of student. However, the reports in which recommendations were made generally described as sound most aspects of academic and personal support.

The audit reports identified a number of cases where a clear institutional strategy for academic and personal support was evident in the quality and consistency of support provided to students, or in the coordination between support at central and local levels. Some reports, however, identified inconsistencies between academic units in the support provided and commented critically where this had the potential to affect particular groups of students.

Personal tutoring arrangements are widespread among institutions and often play an important role in academic support. Many audit reports found good practice in the availability and approachability of academic and support staff, and in the ways in which personal tutoring was being enhanced. Nonetheless, variations in the amount and effectiveness of personal tutoring within institutions were frequently noted, and in several cases these led to recommendations.

Strength was often identified in the support arrangements in place for postgraduate research students, especially in the operation of graduate schools (or similar), in the implementation of supervisory arrangements, and in the support offered to research supervisors. Critical comments were sometimes made, however, in respect of the preparation of postgraduate research students for teaching duties.

The provision of careers education, information and guidance was noted positively in some audit reports, although in a few others criticisms were made where such support was not widely used, or where it did not cater fully for the needs of all students. Good practice was identified in the development of study, transferable and other skills. Institutions took a variety of approaches to implementing PDP and higher education progress files, sometimes relating them to personal tutoring, and sometimes incorporating PDP into the curriculum. Recommendations were

made where a strategic approach to implementation was not evident, or where inconsistency of operation between academic units was identified.

The information provided to students on the academic and personal support available to them was frequently discussed in the audit reports, and generally found to be appropriate. Sources of information included induction arrangements, handbooks, websites and virtual learning environments, and student advice centres. Some of these arrangements were found to be good practice, although in a few cases information was found to be incomplete, and variability in module-level handbooks was sometimes noted.

Institutions' arrangements to monitor and review the provision of academic and personal support for students, although not often discussed in detail, were usually noted positively, especially where such arrangements obviously contributed to institutional planning. In a few cases, however, the absence of review arrangements or the limited nature of monitoring or review prompted recommendations to ensure that an oversight of academic and personal support was maintained.

## Preface

An objective of institutional audit is 'to contribute, in conjunction with other mechanisms, to the promotion and enhancement of high quality in teaching and learning'. To provide institutions and other stakeholders with access to timely information on the findings of its institutional audits, QAA produces short working papers, describing features of good practice and summarising recommendations from the audit reports. Since 2005 these have been published under the generic title '*Outcomes from institutional audit*' (hereafter, *Outcomes...*). The first series of these papers drew on the findings of the audit reports published between 2003 and November 2004. This paper is based on the findings of the institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006. It includes a brief section at the end of the paper which compares its key features with those of its predecessor in the first series of *Outcomes...* papers.

A feature of good practice in institutional audit is considered to be a process, a practice, or a way of handling matters which, in the context of the particular institution, is improving, or leading to the improvement of, the management of quality and/or academic standards, and learning and teaching. *Outcomes...* papers are intended to provide readers with pointers to where features of good practice relating to particular topics can be located in the published audit reports. Each *Outcomes...* paper therefore identifies the features of good practice in individual reports associated with the particular topic and their location in the main report. Although all features of good practice are listed, in the interests of brevity not all are discussed in this paper. In the initial listing in paragraph 4, the first reference is to the numbered or bulleted lists of features of good practice at the end of each institutional audit report, the second to the relevant paragraphs in Section 2 of the main report. Throughout the body of this paper references to features of good practice in the institutional audit reports give the institution's name and the paragraph number from Section 2 of the main report.

It should be emphasised that the features of good practice mentioned in this paper should be considered in their proper institutional context, and that each is perhaps best viewed as a stimulus to reflection and further development rather than as a model for emulation. A note on the topics identified for the second series of *Outcomes...* papers can be found at Appendix 3 (page 24).

As noted above, this second series of *Outcomes...* papers is based on the 59 institutional audit reports published by August 2006 and the titles of papers are in most cases the same as their counterparts in the first series of the *Outcomes* papers. Like the first series of *Outcomes* papers, those in the second series are perhaps best seen as 'work in progress'. Although QAA retains copyright in the contents of the *Outcomes...* papers they can be freely downloaded from QAA's website and cited, with acknowledgement.

### Introduction

1 This paper is based on a review of the outcomes of the 59 institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006 (see Appendix 1, page 20). A note on the methodology used to produce this and other papers in this second *Outcomes...series* can be found at Appendix 4 (page 25).

2 The *Handbook for institutional audit: England (2002)* stated that 'At the centre of the [audit] process is an emphasis on students – in terms of the quality of information they receive..., the ways in which their learning is facilitated and supported, and the academic standards they are expected to achieve...'. To reflect this emphasis, audit reports in the period covered by this paper generally contained two sections specifically relating to the provision of support for students, headed 'Academic guidance, support and supervision' and 'Personal support and guidance'. In the interests of brevity, these headings are abbreviated to 'academic and personal support' in the remainder of this paper. These sections of the reports form the main source for this paper. However, audit teams made enquiries on academic and personal support during the course of the discipline audit trails, and the reports sometimes include comments on academic and personal support in discussions of 'learning support resources' and the 'assurance of the quality of teaching staff through staff support and development', particularly when discussing arrangements for providing development and support for those supervising research students and for research students preparing to take up teaching duties.

3 It should be noted that the support provided in connection with particular types of programme (for example work-based learning or collaborative provision, joint and combined honours programmes) and that provided for particular types of learner (for example students with disabilities and international students) are dealt with in other papers in this series of *Outcomes... papers* and are not covered here. Assessment of students, too, is dealt with in another paper in this series. This paper does, however, include an extended section on the support, supervision and monitoring of postgraduate research students.

## Features of good practice

4 Features of good practice in relation to academic and personal support are cited in 41 of the 59 institutional audit reports. For ease of reference they are listed below under broad thematic headings, although some individual features have attributes that could place them under more than one theme.

### Overall approaches to academic and personal support

- the steps taken by the University to support its students, including: its arrangements for their induction including the diagnostic tests and study skills support it provides for them and the work of its [Academic Skills Tutors]...; its personal tutorial arrangements...; the attention it continues to pay to identifying and meeting the needs of its students in designing and implementing its teaching, learning and assessment arrangements...; the clear focus on the needs of students which its Student Services have adopted...; and the supervision and personal and general support arrangements it has implemented for its research students... [University of Huddersfield, paragraph 317 v; paragraphs 35, 146, 148, 153 and 155]
- the student focused culture to support the development of students through, for example: representation, consultation and collaboration with the Students' Union, the open-door policy of academic staff, the tutoring system, the proactive institutional support mechanisms, and the extent and usage of the Student Experience Survey [Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, paragraph 238 iii; paragraphs 75, 77, 103, 114, 123, 124 and 195]

### The close coordination and comprehensiveness of student support services

- the effectiveness of central student support and learning resources services in their work with each other, with departments and through the personal adviser system [Royal Holloway, University of London, paragraph 215 v; paragraph 117]
- the close coordination of tutorial and supervisory support and student advisory and counselling services, in which the Dean of Students plays a key role [University College London, paragraph 153 iv; paragraph 76]
- the coherence of the University's progress towards placing the student experience at the heart of its enterprise [Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 217 i; paragraphs 38, 104 and 109]
- the comprehensive range of student support initiatives contributing to the quality of students' learning experience [Canterbury Christ Church University, paragraph 242 iii, paragraph 128]
- the overall institutional pastoral support provided for students [University of Manchester, paragraph 211 v; paragraph 96]
- the well-integrated support systems, including the Study Support Centre, which give all students the opportunity to realise their full potential [Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies, paragraph 229 i; paragraphs, 136, 174 and 210]

### The commitment, accessibility and effectiveness of academic and support staff

- the high level of staff commitment to student support, in particular at programme and module level [University of Derby, paragraph 294, fourth bullet point; paragraphs 145, 158 and 159]
- the accessibility of academic staff and the supportive way in which they interact with students [Kingston University, paragraph 237 iv; paragraphs 100, 108, 114, 123 and 136]
- the academic and pastoral support available to students at both faculty and University level [Kingston University, paragraph 237 v; paragraphs 107 and 113]
- the level of accessibility of staff within schools and their support for students, underpinned by the information provided to staff by Student Services [Oxford Brookes University, paragraph 250 iii; paragraphs 113-115, 144, 156, 171 and 186]
- student access to and support from all categories of staff [Staffordshire University, paragraph 251 vi; paragraphs 97, 130, 142 and 188]
- the professional commitment of academic staff in providing a high level of support for students [University of Teesside, paragraph 219 iii; paragraphs 100, 128 and 140]
- the strongly collegial culture that underpins excellent academic and personal support for students [Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 236 v; paragraphs 120, 145-147, 153, 169, 182 and 185]
- the accessibility and supportiveness of staff in their pastoral and academic relations with students, including those in the part-time mode [University College Winchester, paragraph 257 iv; paragraph 128]
- the information and support provided by staff to facilitate student learning [University of Central England, Birmingham, paragraph 219 iii; paragraphs 100, 105 and 110]
- the student academic support systems operating through academic advisers and research supervisors which are successfully combined with informal channels of support developed through the good and productive relationships existing between staff and students [Dartington College of Arts, paragraph 176 iii; paragraph 96]
- the Institute's recognition of the contribution of technician tutors to student learning [The Arts Institute at Bournemouth, paragraph 211 ii; paragraphs 109 and 136]

### The development of skills and personal development planning

- the development and implementation of undergraduate progress files in dentistry [Queen Mary, University of London, paragraph 245, fifth bullet point; paragraph 134]
- the various institutional and departmental initiatives related to the integration of key and transferable skills into the curriculum [Queen Mary, University of London, paragraph 245, seventh bullet point; paragraphs 136 and 164]



## Academic and personal advice, guidance and support for students (including postgraduate research students)

- the effectiveness of the SkillsPlus strategy in drawing together policies relating to student academic support, skills development and employability [University of Plymouth, paragraph 244 v; paragraph 121]
- the [Personal, Professional and Academic Development modules] and the integration of career management into the curriculum [University of Luton, paragraph 251 vi; paragraph 122]
- the empowerment of students to identify and enhance their skills through embedding the Core Skills Policy in the curriculum and developing a set of effective, innovative and attractive PDP materials [London South Bank University, paragraph 200 second bullet point; paragraphs 67, 101, 102 and 103]
- the strategic approach and careful consideration given to the further development and integration of the skills curriculum [University of East London, paragraph 256 iii; paragraphs 40 and 135-137]
- the existing Skillzone provision [University of East London, paragraph 256 viii; paragraph 137]
- the support for students' academic development provided through the Learning Skills Development Scheme [Thames Valley University, paragraph 253 iii; paragraph 113]

### Support and supervision of postgraduate research students

- the clear and comprehensive guidance provided to students through the *Research Studies Handbook* and website [City University, paragraph 320 iv; paragraphs 134 and 241]
- the targeted support available to particular categories of students, such as disabled, mature and postgraduate research students [University of Hull, paragraph 216 v; paragraphs 108, 112, 115 and 118]
- the institutional focus on the development of guidance and support for students, including postgraduate research students and international students [University of Newcastle upon Tyne, paragraph 269 iv; paragraph 139]
- the comprehensive provision for the support, training and supervision of research students [University of Ulster, paragraph 215 v; paragraph 111]
- the CAPITAL programme to support academic staff, and the [Postgraduate Certificate in Skills of Teaching to Inspire Learning] programme to support postgraduate students with teaching responsibilities and non-established teaching staff [Royal Holloway, University of London, paragraph 215 iii; paragraphs 94 and 98]
- the developing role of the Research Degrees Committee in providing a collective view of quality assurance arrangements for research degrees as evidenced by the detailed examination of each precept in the revised *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes* [University of London, paragraph 165 i; paragraphs 45 and 76]
- [the] arrangements for training supervisors of research students [De Montfort University, paragraph 334 iv; paragraph 134]

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- the role and operation of the [Research and Graduate School Office] [Liverpool John Moores University, paragraph 233 second bullet point; paragraphs 117-121]
- the quality of support for postgraduate research students [Oxford Brookes University, paragraph 250 i; paragraphs 116-118 and 217]
- the support for postgraduate research students provided through the Graduate School, facilitating development of the University's research student community [University of Plymouth, paragraph 244 vi; paragraph 124]
- the work of the [Research and Knowledge Transfer Centre], especially in its support for postgraduate research students and in the enhancement of a postgraduate research culture [University College Winchester, paragraph 257 ii; paragraphs 42, 115, 131, 133 and 134]
- the support and environment for postgraduate research students, particularly at the local level [University of Manchester, paragraph 211 ii; paragraph 90]

### Student induction, monitoring and retention

- the promising work of the [Corporate Academic Advisory Service] in terms of student support, its contribution to student retention and its development of a central system for extenuating circumstances treatment [University of Luton, paragraph 251 iv; paragraph 119]
- the introduction of [Student Attainment Review] Boards as a means of supporting students at risk [University of Luton, paragraph 251 v; paragraph 121]
- the student retention project, in particular, its multifaceted action lines and use of performance indicators [Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, paragraph 238 ii; paragraphs 84, 110, 142, 165 and 213]
- the operation of Welcome Week and mentoring which support the induction of new students [Staffordshire University, paragraph 251 v; paragraphs 92, 144 and 177]
- the role of senior students in induction and in enhancing the resident student experience [University College Winchester, paragraph 257 v; paragraph 138]
- the information and support provided for pre-entry students [University of Manchester, paragraph 211 iii; paragraph 91]
- the role of [the External and Internal Student Administration Division] in its administrative support of the student lifecycle [University of London External System, paragraph 145, third bullet point; paragraph 94]
- the ways in which the College engenders a commitment among staff and students to its particular ethos, specifically through the thoroughness of its processes for staff appointment and student admissions, including arrangements for induction [Dartington College of Arts, paragraph 176 ii; paragraphs 78 and 91]

### Information for students

- the comprehensive, accurate and accessible information provided to students including the Student Portal which allows seamless access to a variety of e-learning resources [University of Nottingham, paragraph 302 iii; paragraphs 102, 139, 166, 187, 204, 223 and 240]

## Academic and personal advice, guidance and support for students (including postgraduate research students)

- the introduction of Student Information and Advice Centres across the campuses [University of Gloucestershire, paragraph 316 viii; paragraph 160]
- the on-line [Personal Information Portal] developed by the University for its students [Oxford Brookes University, paragraph 250 ii; paragraphs 112, 141 and 193]

### The provision of specialist services

- the quality of support for students offered through the Counselling Service [American InterContinental University - London, paragraph 217 i; paragraph 128]
- the high quality Careers Service provided for students and recent graduates [University of Manchester, paragraph 211 iv; paragraph 95]

### Institutional policies and strategies for widening participation and for cultural and religious diversity

- the engagement and participation of the University, through its schools and services, in local community activities in support of its widening participation plans [City University; paragraph 320 v; paragraph 139]
- the College's approach to outreach activity, exemplified by the [Innovative Scheme for Post-docs in Research and Education] project and the collaboration with Thames Valley University [Imperial College London, paragraph 302 iv; paragraphs 149 and 151]
- the Learning Through Work Scheme and its reflective approach to this innovative area of practice [University of Derby, paragraph 294, fifth bullet point; paragraph 153]
- the University's equitable approach to, and support for, its part-time staff and students [University of East London, paragraph 256 v; paragraphs 104, 112, 126-127 and 136]
- the support provided for students in the context of the University's culture of equality and diversity [University of East London, paragraph 256 vii; paragraphs 126, 129 and 136]
- the University's student support mechanisms, especially with respect to its policies and strategies for cultural and religious diversity [University of Westminster, paragraph 241 i; paragraphs 29, 95, 118, 130, 140 and 173]
- the recognition of the need for, and positive action to secure, an ethnic and cultural mix within the staff [in particular, the report referred to financial support for ethnic-minority postgraduate students wishing to teach in higher education, which indirectly provided achievement models and empathic support for future students, paragraph 128] [University of Westminster, paragraph 241 iii; paragraphs 128 and 130]

### Other areas

- the effectiveness of the joint University/[Student Union] strategy for student representation on committees [in particular, the report referred to 'the strong partnership between the University [Integrated Student Services] and the

[Student Union] Advice Centre... paragraph 116] [University of Hull, paragraph 216 iv; paragraphs 73, 76 and 116]

- the provision of the inter-professional programme in year one of all degree programmes with the use of personal tutors to lead case-based learning [St George's Hospital Medical School, paragraph 188 iii; paragraphs 96, 110 and 171]
- the strong student focus of the University's development plans, as demonstrated by a number of initiatives including the de Havilland Campus, the Learning Resource Centres and the Student Centre [University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 204 i; paragraphs 5, 93-97 and 99]
- the priority given by the University to the quality of the student experience, particularly international students, students with disabilities, students progressing from Foundation Degrees and students on placements [University of Northumbria at Newcastle, paragraph 254 v; paragraph 132 and 198]
- the University's commitment to enhance further its student support services [University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 257 i; paragraphs 90-92]

5 Recommendations for further action or development relating to academic and personal support are found in just under a third of the 59 audit reports studied for this paper. Both recommendations and features of good practice are discussed in paragraphs seven to 30.

### Themes

6 In the 59 institutional audit reports considered for this paper, the major themes relating to the provision of academic and personal support for students include:

- institutional strategies relating to the provision of academic and personal support
- personal tutoring and academic support
- the support and supervision of postgraduate research students
  - graduate schools
  - training for postgraduate research students
  - supervision of postgraduate research students
  - monitoring postgraduate research students' progress
- careers education, information and guidance for students
- support for skills development and for personal development planning (PDP)
- provision of information relating to academic and personal support
- monitoring and review of academic and personal support systems.

### Institutional strategies relating to the provision of academic and personal support

7 It is clear from the institutional audit reports that many institutions have developed arrangements for student support which are based on the provision of academic and personal support at the local level by academic departments and schools, combined with the provision of more specialised support by centrally provided professional services such as careers guidance. The overall quality of academic and personal support and the links between different aspects of the provision are mentioned in several reports as examples of clear institutional strategies and features of good practice. These include, for example:

- University of Huddersfield [paragraphs 146, 148, 153 and 155]
- Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College [paragraph 75]
- Liverpool Hope University [paragraph 120]
- University of Manchester [paragraph 96]
- Royal Holloway, University of London [paragraph 117]
- Canterbury Christ Church University College [paragraph 128]
- Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies [paragraphs 136].

8 Although the boundaries between locally provided and centrally provided support arrangements may vary between institutions, in general, locally provided academic support is intended to combine with the centrally provided services to produce an effective system. As an instance of such sound arrangements one report noted 'the close co-ordination of tutorial and supervisory support and student advisory and counselling services, in which the Dean of Students plays a key role' and found this to be a feature of good practice [University College London, paragraph 76].

9 By way of contrast to the above, a significant number of the recommendations linked to academic and personal support related to the variability of support across departments and specialist providers and the need to ensure that all students received comparable levels of support. Several audit reports identified that some groups of students had experienced different (and, in some cases, inferior) levels of academic support. For example, in one institution both the self-evaluation document and students written submission had identified variations in the way personal tutor support and other elements of academic guidance were provided from department to department. The report endorsed these findings and recommended that the institution should remain alert 'to differences in departmental approaches to academic guidance and student support, and act, where appropriate, to establish clear [institution-wide] boundaries to acceptable diversity of practice'. Another report, for a much smaller institution, acknowledged that the mix of informal approaches it had followed had generally been effective, as seen in high student retention rates, but that informality had given rise to local differences in the first point of contact available to students. These variations meant that the institution could not guarantee equity of access at a time of rising student numbers. The report recommended that the institution '[formalise] practice across the [institution] for the provision of academic and personal support in order to ensure clarity of information, and consistent and equitable treatment of students'

10 Other audit reports commented on the need for institutions to achieve more timely and more coordinated provision of support services for students and to develop a comprehensive and integrated approach to the provision of student services. One report, for example, noted that in circumstances where programmes and provision crossed faculty and school boundaries, students might encounter different levels of expertise and understanding of their circumstances among the academic advisers designated to support them. In this case, the institution was recommended to share good practice among its academic advisers to 'reinforce the standard of school and faculty-level guidance for undergraduate students'.

### Personal tutoring and academic support

11 A substantial number of institutional audit reports identified the commitment, accessibility and effectiveness of academic, central and technical staff as features of good practice. Such reports included:

- University of Huddersfield [paragraph 155]
- Kingston University [paragraphs 100 and 108]
- University of Teesside [paragraphs 100, 128 and 140]
- University of Derby [paragraphs 145, 158 and 159]
- Staffordshire University [paragraph 97, 130, 142 and 188]
- University College Winchester [paragraph 128]
- Oxford Brookes University [paragraphs 144-156, 171 and 186]
- Dartington College of Arts [paragraph 96]
- The Arts Institute at Bournemouth [paragraphs 109 and 136].

12 Factors cited as contributing to the view that the performance of staff in providing personal tutoring support constituted a feature of good practice could include comprehensive institution-wide arrangements; effective links between front-line teaching and support staff and central student support and pastoral services; provision of effective advice when choosing modules and courses; finding creative ways to widen the net of student support; and careful consideration of the needs of incoming first-year students. One example may suffice to indicate the range of evidence drawn on by audit teams when coming to such a view. In this case the audit team found evidence that:

a comprehensive range of support mechanisms [is] in place both locally and University-wide and [the] students felt well supported. Moreover, the University has clearly linked the provision of both academic and pastoral support to its strategic aims.... The audit team formed the view that the wide range of support mechanisms and initiatives at the University made available to ensure that students are well supported was good practice ... [A]cademic guidance and support and supervision at the University [are] broadly aligned to the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*.... Also of particular note was the consistent praise given by students to the academic staff for their approachability and accessibility. Students who met the team felt that this support had made a significant, positive contribution to their overall learning experience [Kingston University, paragraph 108].

13 The evidence of the audit reports suggests that in general, academic and personal support, particularly the commitment and accessibility of staff, can be considered to be an area of overall strength across the sector. Nevertheless, concerns about arrangements for personal tutor support were noted in several reports. One institution was encouraged to establish a more explicit statement of its expectations of student contact with personal supervisors in order to strengthen the self-referral arrangements then in place, as a minority of students who met the audit team appeared to be unaware of the role of personal supervisors. The student written submission in another institution reported significant variations between campuses and schools in the levels of academic support available and this was confirmed in discussions with staff and students. The institution was recommended to consider 'how it might achieve an effective academic counselling system for all students, and how it might closely monitor its implementation'.

14 A further institution was recommended to keep under review personal support for students to ensure that the variety of personal tutoring arrangements continued to reflect their particular identified needs. The institution did not specify a minimum entitlement for personal tutor support and therefore, at the local level, programmes had developed their own entitlement models. In this case the arrangements to provide personal tutorial support for joint honours students involved personal tutors who might be responsible for between 170 and 180 students. Additionally, the separation of academic support from programmes or modules was reported as limiting some students' awareness of personal tutor arrangements, creating a perceived lack of continuity in support and a depersonalisation of the tutorial function. In this case, the institution was also recommended to secure and assure 'an equivalence of student experience for students registered on [its joint honours scheme]'.

### The support and supervision of postgraduate research students

15 Features of good practice relating to the support provided for postgraduate research students were noted in a substantial number of institutional audit reports. These were sometimes expressed in broad terms, and in one institution it covered the 'comprehensive and effective' framework to support, train and monitor the progress of research students and to enhance the quality of research supervision [University of Ulster, paragraph 111]. In another institution good practice was found in the quality and integrated nature of the supervision and support offered to postgraduate research students. Developments in this case included: the creation of a Graduate School; an institutional code of practice designed to be fully in alignment with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*; institution-wide induction; a team model for supervision; the training of new supervisors; the existence of a Research Students' Committee on which each school was represented; the establishment of a Postgraduate Society; the free English support for international students; the provision of skills training; the personal development planner and diary; the activity of the Research Training Coordinator; and the training of research students to teach [Oxford Brookes University, paragraphs 116-118]. In a further institution, the report referred to the multi-faceted support provided for postgraduate research students,

exemplified by the mounting of a special Easter School programme for those students pursuing research degrees on a part-time or distance learning basis [University of Hull, paragraph 112].

### Graduate schools

16 A number of audit reports drew positive attention to the activities of graduate schools in support of postgraduate research students [Liverpool John Moores University, paragraphs 117-119; University College Winchester, paragraphs 115, 131, 133 and 134; University of Plymouth, paragraph 124]. One report noted that a graduate school was valued by students as it afforded them a sense of identity as well as providing improved learning facilities and social space; the report also noted that the School was making a significant input to ensuring the alignment of institutional procedures with the recently revised *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes* [University of Plymouth, paragraph 124]. However, the continued need to keep under review the effectiveness of a graduate school was noted by another audit report, for an institution where student awareness and engagement with the School were variable and where there was no annual evaluation of its effectiveness in quality enhancement. Another report encouraged the institution to continue to develop a virtual graduate school intended to combat the relative isolation of some postgraduate research students, 'as a means of integrating the graduate research student experience across the schools'.

17 Other audit reports drew attention to the support offered in faculties and schools. At one institution, newly-established faculty graduate schools, providing a physical environment to support research, and generating a sense of belonging to a community of scholars, drew praise from graduate students. Another institution's current priorities included 'the development and enhancement of supervisory practice for research students' and the support and environment for postgraduate research students, particularly at the local level, was found to be a feature of good practice [University of Manchester, paragraph 90].

### Training for postgraduate research students

18 The institutional provision of training in research methodology and generic skills, while generally widespread, prompted little comment in the audit reports. Several reports contain references to programmes for the training of postgraduate research students to undertake teaching duties. In one report, a Postgraduate Certificate in Skills of Teaching to Inspire Learning (inSTIL), mandatory for postgraduate students with significant teaching responsibilities who did not already hold an equivalent qualification, was identified as a feature of good practice [Royal Holloway, University of London, paragraph 98]. Another institution, whose policies and practices in the field of staff development, training and support were identified as a feature of good practice, offered hourly paid staff and postgraduate research students a Certificate (of Credit) in Teaching Skills [London Metropolitan University, paragraph 74]. Considerably more reports, however, indicated concerns about the nature and availability of training for postgraduate research students undertaking teaching and made recommendations for action in this area. This is discussed in greater detail in the paper in this series on *Staff support and development*.



### Supervision of postgraduate research students

19 The audit reports noted arrangements for the supervision of postgraduate research students, with the use of teams of supervisors widespread. In some institutions the 'second supervisor' had the role of a personal adviser, with further support coming from departmental or faculty directors of graduate studies. All postgraduate research students were required to have both a research supervisor and a personal tutor in an institution whose arrangements to monitor and support the learning experience of research students contributed to a feature of good practice [University of Huddersfield, paragraph 152]. The reports indicated that in almost every case students were provided with relevant information in the form of handbooks or codes of practice. In one report the level of detail and comprehensive nature of the *Research Studies Handbook* and website was identified as a feature of good practice [City University, paragraph 134].

20 Only a few of the audit reports refer specifically to the training provided in research supervision for new and existing staff. It was noted in one report that teaching staff who wished to supervise postgraduate research students were required to follow an award-bearing training programme in research supervision, which was designed to meet the needs of new supervisors and to provide an opportunity to update the knowledge of more experienced supervisors, was highly regarded by staff and was a feature of good practice [De Montfort University, paragraph 134]. A number of institutions had used the supervisory team model as a means of augmenting training for newly appointed or inexperienced staff. It was noted in one report that supervisors new to research supervision were generally attached to a supervisory panel with a more experienced colleague, and were required to undertake the institution's Professional Development Programme for Supervisors. Examples were also found, however, of training programmes that were only at the planning stage or were not mandatory.

### Monitoring postgraduate research students' progress

21 The monitoring of the progress of postgraduate research students was usually found to take place through the submission by the student of an annual report to be scrutinised by the Graduate School, Research Degrees Committee or Faculty Research Degrees Committee. The student's report might be discussed with the supervisor(s) before submission and this discussion could sometimes take the form of a formal interview. Such student reports were usually accompanied by a separate report from the supervisor; at one institution these reports were found not always to be completed in timely fashion. At one institution, the student would be interviewed by the Head of the Research and Knowledge Transfer Centre when progress was deemed to be unsatisfactory. The processes for annual review were usually found to be satisfactory, although at one institution they were reported to be not always applied consistently. In another case the institution was recommended to review its monitoring of postgraduate research students' progress, where reporting operated with variable consistency, and where it was unclear that students would report problems with progress relating to their supervisors or faculties on an open form.

### Careers education, information and guidance for students

22 Several institutional audit reports commented favourably on the high quality of support provided by careers services for students and recent graduates. In one report it was noted that the Careers Service operated on three sites across the campus and that students had the support of 17 Careers Consultants and access to a dedicated library and website. The report described how 'Careers Management Skills' units had been embedded in the curriculum and noted that careers provision had been repeatedly singled out for praise by both undergraduate and postgraduate students and that employers held it in high regard. The work done by the institution's Careers Service was identified as a feature of good practice [University of Manchester, paragraph 95]. A number of other reports referred to the high regard in which careers services were held by students.

23 Support for careers education, information and guidance for students appeared to be less satisfactory in some other institutions than in the example cited above. In two instances, audit reports for small and specialist institutions offered recommendations. In one case, the report noted that students would not necessarily be able to achieve or sustain a career in their chosen specialist subject or practice area. Consequently, the report identified a need for the institution to coordinate practical opportunities for students to gain knowledge or experience of wider career openings. The institution was recommended to 'formulate a clear and documented policy for career education, information and guidance which is informed by data on graduate destinations'. In a similar case, a small and specialist institution depended on a larger federal institution for the delivery of careers education, information and guidance. In this instance, students found that the centrally provided services had not been attuned to providing effective support in their particular circumstances. The report recommended 'establishing an [institution-wide] approach to career education information and guidance and skill development'.

### Support for skills development and for personal development planning (PDP)

24 A number of institutional audit reports drew attention to good practice in the development of employability or academic skills, especially where central learning support units were found to make a particularly positive contribution or where progress was being made in integrating skills development into the curriculum [University of East London, paragraphs 40 and 137; Queen Mary, University of London, paragraph 136; Thames Valley University, paragraph 113]. One report, however, recommended that the institution review the provision of learning skills support in the context of an increasingly diverse student intake, where students were returning to master's level study from industry and commerce.

25 PDP and higher education progress files often played an important role in supporting skills development. Many institutions appeared to relate PDP to personal tutoring schemes and the view was sometimes expressed that this link had helped to reinvigorate such schemes or would do so in the future. In one case where the accessibility of staff and their support for students was regarded as a feature of good practice, the audit report agreed with the view taken by the institution that the introduction of a new policy linking personal tutoring with PDP would enhance

academic and personal support [Oxford Brookes University, paragraph 114]. In another case progress files formed the basis for contact with personal tutors, with twice yearly reviews of progress being carried out by a dean and senior tutor. Students were very positive about this development and the decision to disseminate it more widely was welcomed; the approach was noted as a feature of good practice. [Queen Mary, University of London, paragraph 134].

26 In other institutions, efforts were being made to embed PDP and skills development within curricula. In one institution where this was the case the audit report identified the Personal, Professional and Academic Development modules and the integration of career management into the curriculum as a feature of good practice [University of Luton, paragraph 122]. In another institution, in which PDP was being related to personal tutoring and careers management and skills development were being included in undergraduate programmes, the report identified as good practice the effectiveness of the institution's strategy in bringing together policies relating to student academic support, skills development and employability [University of Plymouth, paragraph 121].

27 While some audit reports noted positive views of PDP among staff and students, a number noted that some staff and students were unclear about its merits. For example, one report identified a need for the institution 'to develop and implement an institutional framework for students' personal development planning, including the fostering of increased staff engagement and commitment to the process', citing staff views that there was a need to demonstrate the importance of PDP if students were going to engage effectively with the process. Other reports referred to variability in the implementation of PDP or progress files. In one case a report noted that the institution had taken the decision that all students should have access to PDP, but the implementation was left to the discretion of the faculties. The discipline audit trails revealed some inconsistency in staff understanding of PDP and the institution was recommended to ensure 'greater clarity and consistency, while allowing some measured diversity, in the rolling out of student PDP across the institution'.

### **Provision of information relating to academic and personal support**

28 The institutional audit reports suggest that clear information was generally provided to students on the academic and personal support available at central and departmental levels. Information on the support available was often provided to applicants and prospective students prior to their arrival at the institution. In one case this was identified as a feature of good practice, where pre-entry events and information were informative and comprehensive [University of Manchester, paragraph 91]. Induction arrangements were frequently noted to familiarise students with the university environment, including the support available. In some cases these induction arrangements were identified as features of good practice [Staffordshire University, paragraph 144; University College Winchester, paragraph 138; Dartington College of Arts, paragraph 91]. Other sources of information about the support on offer included student handbooks and guides at both institutional and departmental level, websites and portals, and through student advice centres. Aspects of this information were identified as features of good practice in a small number of institutions, including examples of accessible information on student portals and the

introduction of student information and advice centres [University of Gloucestershire, paragraph 160; Oxford Brookes University, paragraph 112]. In only a few cases did reports note examples of a mismatch between student expectations and the support provided, or examples where take-up of services was seen to be low because students were unaware of the services on offer. In one case, where a student charter helped to explain students' responsibilities and what they might expect from the institution, the report recommended that the institution give the charter a higher profile, given its utility. In a few institutions, programme and module level handbooks were seen to be of variable quality.

### Monitoring and review of academic and personal support systems

29 Generally, institutional audit reports noted positively institutional arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the academic and personal support available to students. Reviews were noted of academic and personal support generally, or of particular aspects of it, for example personal tutoring, or research training for postgraduate students. Arrangements to monitor and review the support provided to particular categories of student, for example mature students, postgraduate research students, students with disabilities, or those on placements, were also noted, in addition to reviews and monitoring of particular service providers, including graduate schools. Arrangements noted include the use of surveys and questions and the submission of annual monitoring and periodic and special review reports.

30 In some other cases, however, improvements to institutions' arrangements were recommended by the audit reports. In one case, where personal tutoring was being reviewed and heads of school were being invited to consider the most appropriate arrangements for their school, subject to institutional requirements, the report noted that faculty teaching and learning committees' responsibilities for reviewing proposals were unclear, as was the way in which the institution assured itself that the systems were operating effectively in line with its expectations. In another case, a report questioned the extent to which a student office had achieved an integrated institution-level overview of student services, given that a number of those services did not fall under its remit, and evidence was lacking of a regular cycle of service reports and plans or institutional reviews of provision. In one case, where the institution did not have clear arrangements for the regular monitoring of student support services at affiliated institutions, the report recommended that the institution implement its requirements that affiliates develop learning and teaching strategies to include a remit for student support and guidance.

### **The findings of this paper and of its counterpart in the first series of *Outcomes...* papers compared**

31 A comparison of the findings of this paper and those of the paper on 'Academic guidance, support and supervision, and personal support and guidance' in the first series of *Outcomes...* papers shows that in general, institutions have established a wide variety of effective arrangements for the academic and personal guidance and support for their students, and for providing them with appropriate personal support and guidance. Both papers list many more features of good practice than recommendations and suggest that the provision of academic and personal support for students is an area of strength in many institutions. Both papers note recommendations in a limited number of cases including: the consistency with which support was provided across academic units; careers advice; PDP; and the need for improved monitoring of academic and personal support.

### **Conclusions**

32 Overall, consideration of the 59 institutional audit reports published between November 2004 and August 2006 suggests that institutions have continued to develop a wide range of effective arrangements for providing academic and personal guidance and support for their students, including postgraduate research students. The features of good practice identified in the reports far outweigh those where areas for development were identified and recommendations for action made. A notable feature of the reports was the large number of features of good practice relating to the commitment, accessibility and effectiveness of academic and support staff, and those relating to the support and supervision of postgraduate research students. However, there were a number of recommendations relating to the lack of consistency in the provision of academic and personal support where it was provided at the local level by departments and schools.

## **Appendix 1 - The institutional audit reports**

### **Note**

In the period covered by these papers a number of institutions underwent a variety of scrutiny procedures for taught degree-awarding powers, university title and research degree-awarding powers. Reports of the individual scrutiny processes were provided to QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree-Awarding Powers, and its Board of Directors, and formed the basis for advice to the Privy Council on the applications made by the respective institutions.

In most cases the scrutiny processes also provided information which, in the form of a bespoke report, QAA accepted as the equivalent of an institutional audit report. Only those reports which conform to the general pattern of the institutional audit reports are included in the list below.

### **2004-05**

City University

Cranfield University

University of Hull

University of Leicester

University of Newcastle upon Tyne

University of Nottingham

The Queen's University Belfast

University of Surrey

University of Ulster

Goldsmiths College, University of London

Queen Mary, University of London

Royal Holloway and Bedford New College (Royal Holloway, University of London)

University of London

University College London

Birkbeck College, University of London

Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine (Imperial College London)

St George's Hospital Medical School

University of Derby

De Montfort University

University of Gloucestershire

University of Hertfordshire  
Sheffield Hallam University  
University of Huddersfield  
Kingston University  
London Metropolitan University  
Leeds Metropolitan University  
Liverpool John Moores University  
University of Luton<sup>1</sup>  
University of Northumbria at Newcastle  
Oxford Brookes University  
University of Plymouth  
Staffordshire University  
London South Bank University  
University of Sunderland  
University of Teesside  
University of East London  
University of the West of England, Bristol  
University of Westminster  
Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College<sup>2</sup>  
Canterbury Christ Church University College<sup>3</sup>  
University of Chester  
Liverpool Hope University  
University College Winchester<sup>4</sup>  
Henley Management College<sup>5</sup>  
Harper Adams University College  
Conservatoire for Dance and Drama  
American InterContinental University - London

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<sup>1</sup> Now the University of Bedfordshire

<sup>2</sup> Now Buckinghamshire New University

<sup>3</sup> Now Canterbury Christ Church University

<sup>4</sup> Now the University of Winchester

<sup>5</sup> Now merged with the University of Reading

2005-06

University of Manchester

Courtauld Institute of Art

Heythrop College

University of London External System

London School of Economics and Political Science

University of Bolton

Thames Valley University

University of Central England in Birmingham<sup>6</sup>

University of Worcester

Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies<sup>7</sup>

Dartington College of Arts<sup>8</sup>

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth

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<sup>6</sup> Now Birmingham City University

<sup>7</sup> Now University College Birmingham

<sup>8</sup> Now part of the University College Falmouth



## **Appendix 2 - Reports on specialist institutions**

### **2004-05**

Birkbeck College, University of London

Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine (Imperial College London)

St George's Hospital Medical School

Henley Management College

Harper Adams University College

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

American Intercontinental University

### **2005-06**

Courtauld Institute of Art

Heythrop College

University of London External System

London School of Economics and Political Science

Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies

Dartington College of Arts

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth

### **Appendix 3 - Titles of Outcomes from institutional audit papers, Series 2**

In most cases, *Outcomes...* papers will be no longer than 20 sides of A4. Projected titles of *Outcomes...* papers in the second series are listed below in provisional order of publication.

The first series of papers can be found on QAA's website at [www.qaa.ac.uk/enhancement](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/enhancement).

#### **Titles**

Institutions' frameworks for managing quality and academic standards  
Progression and completion statistics  
Learning support resources (including virtual learning environments)  
Assessment of students  
Work-based and placement learning, and employability  
Programme monitoring arrangements  
Arrangements for international students  
Institutions' work with employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies  
Recruitment and admission of students  
External examiners and their reports  
Collaborative provision in the institutional audit reports  
Institutions' arrangements to support widening participation and access to higher education  
Institutions' support for e-learning  
Specialist institutions  
Student representation and feedback  
Academic guidance, support and supervision, and personal support and guidance  
Staff support and development arrangements  
Subject benchmark statements  
The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland  
Programme specifications  
Arrangements for combined, joint and multidisciplinary honours degrees programmes  
The adoption and use of learning outcomes  
Validation and approval of new provision, and its periodic review  
The self-evaluation document in institutional audit  
The contribution of the student written submission to institutional audit  
Institutions' intentions for enhancement  
Series 2: concluding overview

## Appendix 4 - Methodology

The analysis of the institutional audit reports uses the headings set out in Annex H of the *Handbook for institutional audit: England* (2002) to subdivide the Summary, Main report and Findings sections of the audit reports into broad areas. An example from the Main report is 'The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision'.

For each published report, the text is taken from the report published on QAA's website and converted to plain text format. The resulting files are checked for accuracy and coded into sections following the template used to construct the institutional audit reports. In addition, the text of each report is tagged with information providing the date the report was published and some basic characteristics of the institution ('base data'). The reports are then introduced into a qualitative research software package, QSR N6®. The software provides a wide range of tools to support indexing and searching and allows features of interest to be coded for further investigation.

An audit team's judgements, its identification of features of good practice, and its recommendations appear at two points in an institutional audit report: the Summary and at the end of the Findings. It is only in the latter, however, that cross references to the paragraphs in the Main report are to be found, and it is here that the grounds for identifying a feature of good practice, offering a recommendation and making a judgement are set out. These cross references are used to locate features of good practice and recommendations to the particular sections of the report to which they refer.

Individual *Outcomes...* papers are compiled by QAA staff and experienced institutional auditors. To assist in compiling the papers, reports produced by QSR N6® are made available to authors to provide a broad picture of the overall distribution of features of good practice and recommendations in particular areas, as seen by the audit teams.

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