QAA

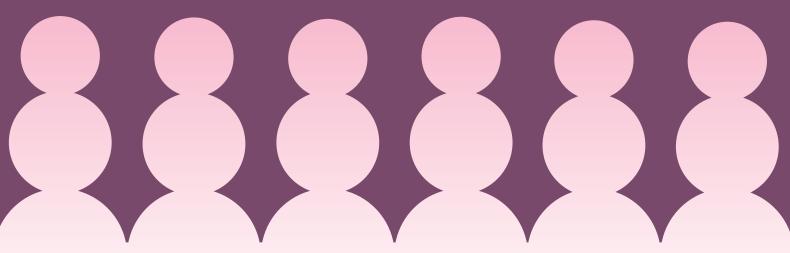# Outcomes from institutional audit

Student representation and feedback arrangements

Second series

Sharing good practice

Summary

It is clear from the institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006 that, in general, institutions are aware of the significance of representation and feedback to the experience of students as learners. It is recognised that student representation is integral to the enhancement of academic quality, and to sustaining academic standards. Institutions also recognise that it is in their interests to listen and respond to the views of students.

At institutional level there is much evidence of a high level of commitment to involve students in academic governance and quality assurance arrangements by ensuring that they have the opportunity to be represented on appropriate committees and to make their views known. At this level, students are usually represented by their elected officers who are able to commit the time required to attend and participate fully in the work of a wide range of committees and other institutional activities. There is also evidence of close links between senior institutional managers and student representative bodies, with much good practice being identified in this area.

At operational level students are generally represented on the basis of modules or programmes. In addition to representation on programme, departmental, school or faculty committees, some institutions also operate student-staff liaison or consultative committees. As at institutional level, formal arrangements for representation are frequently supplemented by informal, and more immediate, contact with academic staff.

The involvement of officers of the students' union (or its equivalent) is often key to the success of representation. Effective collaboration between institutions and these representative bodies can strengthen and enhance the effectiveness of student representatives by, for example, providing training or offering incentives to encourage participation.

Most institutions acknowledge the need to keep the systems for student representation under review and to enhance them by building on good practice. In view of the growing diversity of the student body, some institutions have adopted measures to ensure the proper representation of the views of part-time students, those studying off-campus and those with particular needs, such as postgraduate and research, international and mature students.

There is general recognition of the importance of collecting feedback from students on their experiences and informing them about the actions taken in response. Further work remains to be done by some institutions to 'close the loop' in this respect. The development of systematic arrangements to survey the views of graduates is at an early stage in most institutions.

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, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (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 5, 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 first and second series of *Outcomes...* papers can be found at Appendix 3 (page 20).

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 its web site and cited, with acknowledgement.

Introduction and general overview

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 16). A note on the methodology used to produce this and other papers in this second *Outcomes...* series can be found at Appendix 4 (page 22).

2   As noted in the equivalent paper in the first series of *Outcomes…*:

Students are central both to the principal focuses of institutional audit and to the audit process itself. Hence, among other matters relating to the student learning experience, the audit reports describe and analyse student representation at operational and institutional level, and institutions' arrangements for obtaining feedback from students, graduates and employers. Students are invited to participate at various stages of the audit process: their representative body is invited to make a written submission to inform the audit and meetings with students are arranged during the briefing and audit visits to ensure that they have the opportunity to bring matters to the attention of the audit team. (*Outcomes from institutional audit Student representation and feedback arrangements*, QAA, 2005)

Since the publication of the reports considered in this paper, QAA has worked to introduce student members of audit teams.

3   It is clear from the audit reports considered here that, in general, institutions recognise the importance of student representation and feedback to the management of academic quality and standards, and to the learning experience of students. It is therefore in the interests of individual institutions to listen and respond to the views of their students. Accordingly, institutions provide both formal and informal routes for student representation and feedback. The relative importance of these routes differs between institutions.

4   Features of good practice that relate to student representation and feedback were cited in 24 audit reports. A similar proportion of reports contained recommendations for further consideration, with a number commenting on the need for institutions to develop improved systems for obtaining and responding to student feedback. Feedback to institutions from employers forms part of another paper in this series which considers how institutions work with employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

Features of good practice

5   Consideration of the institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006 shows a number of features of good practice relating to student representation and feedback. In the lists that follow, these features are divided into those concerning representation and those concerning feedback from students. Those linked to both elements are listed only once. Features of good practice related to representation include:

● the effectiveness of the joint University/[Students' Union] strategy for student representation on committees [University of Hull, paragraph 216 iv; paragraphs 73, 76 and 116]

● the close working relationship between senior University officers (academic and administrative) and the Student Union (SU) sabbatical officers, which clearly has a positive impact on matters relating to quality management and extends to the involvement of SU officers in associated project work [University of Leicester, paragraph 287 ii; paragraph 89]

● the effectiveness of representative committees at the school and University level to capture and respond to students' concerns [University of Newcastle upon Tyne, paragraph 269 ii; paragraph 90]

● the responsive approach to student representation which promotes active student involvement in University processes at all levels in the institution [University of Nottingham, paragraphs 302 i; paragraphs 29, 74 and 77]

● the responsiveness of the University to its students, manifest in the various means by which it ensures that the student voice is heard… [The Queen's University of Belfast, paragraph 260 third bullet; paragraphs 86 and 87]

● student membership of internal (periodic) review panels [Queen Mary, University of London, paragraph 245 second bullet; paragraph 66]

● the support given to student representatives in the faculties [De Montfort University, paragraph 334 iii; paragraphs 99 and 198]

● the partnership between the University and [the Students' Union] to improve student representation [University of Plymouth, paragraph 244 iii; paragraph 86]

● 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 institution of an influential committee dedicated to enhancing the student experience with direct access to the Board of Governors and Academic Board [London South Bank University, paragraph 200 third bullet; paragraph 74]

● the openness of senior managers in their engagements with staff and students [University of East London, paragraph 256 i; paragraphs 27, 39 and 83]

● 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…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 staff-student consultative committees in affiliates, especially where they provide access to senior management and where regular progress reports are provided to students [Conservatoire for Dance and Drama, paragraph 134 iii; paragraph 63]

- the introduction of an innovative form of representation by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine [University of London External System, paragraph 145 second bullet; paragraph 66]

- the appointment of the Students' Union President as chair of the Learning Resource Centre User Group which promotes effective communication of the student voice [Thames Valley University, paragraph 253 i; paragraph 79]

- student involvement as advisers in teaching staff appointments [The Arts Institute at Bournemouth, paragraph 211 i; paragraph 105].

6   Consideration of the audit reports shows the following features of good practice relating to feedback arrangements:

- the effectiveness of SOLE [student on-line evaluation] which has the potential to contribute to quality assurance and enhancement. The audit team noted, in particular, the engagement of students with the process and the use of results in the Personal Review and Development Planning and promotion processes [Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, paragraph 302 ii; paragraphs 96, 103 and 112]

- the arrangements for the annual appraisal of academic staff, which integrate peer observation and student feedback into the appraisal process, and the use of the outcomes to inform staff development planning [University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 204 ii; paragraphs 74 and 82]

- the responsiveness of the University, at all levels, to student views [Kingston University, paragraph 237 iii; paragraphs 79, 137, 138 and 179]

- student access to and support from all categories of staff [in particular, the actions taken to improve services, in response to student views] [Staffordshire University, paragraph 251 vi; paragraphs 97, 130, 142 and 188]

- the University's commitment to enhance further its student support services [in particular, a review of student facing services, undertaken in response to an annual survey of student views] [University of the West of England, paragraph 257 i; paragraphs 90 to 92]

- the immediacy of response to student feedback provided through the student representative system and workshop evaluations [Henley Management College, paragraph 213 iii; paragraphs 76 and 78]

- the way in which the College's student-focused approach supports a positive learning experience [in particular, the report concluded that students were 'well represented at institutional and operational levels' and noted that there were good opportunities to provide feedback and that student opinions were frequently surveyed] [Harper Adams University College, paragraph 189 vi; paragraphs 82 and 89]

- the success of the informal and formal course evaluation mechanisms in responding to student opinion [Courtauld Institute of Art, paragraph 152 i; paragraphs 33, 68 and 108]

- the clear link between student feedback and action at all levels within the institution and its collaborative partners [University of Central England in Birmingham, paragraph 219 i; paragraphs 75 and 100].

Themes

7   A consideration of the sections of the audit reports relating to student representation and feedback arrangements suggest the following broad themes for further discussion:

- representation at institutional level

- representation at operational level

- the role of students' unions

- enhancing the effectiveness of student representation

- feedback from students

- feedback from graduates.

Representation at institutional level

8   It is clear from the audit reports that institutions appreciated the benefits of effective student representation at both institutional and operational levels, and that most regarded active student representation as an important element of the management of academic quality and standards. Reference is made in most of the reports to a high level of commitment to involve students in academic governance and quality assurance arrangements by ensuring that they had the opportunity to be represented on appropriate committees and were able to express their views and be involved in decision making. The commitment to provide opportunities and encouragement for students to participate in the work of committees was found to be enshrined in some institutions in a student charter, and in others student representation on senior committees was prescribed by statute or articles of government. It was noted in several reports that institutions had devised policies for such areas, such as a student representation policy which set out key principles for representation, or a quality policy which stated that students were entitled to contribute to the shaping of policies and procedures relating to academic quality and standards.

9   At institutional level students were usually represented by officers of the students' union or an equivalent body, who were able to commit the time required to attend and participate fully in the work of a wide range of committees. In most cases, institutional bodies on which it was considered appropriate for there to be student representation were defined as the governing body, senate or the equivalent, and the committees concerned with learning and teaching, quality assurance and the student experience in general. One institution's 'responsive approach to student representation', which promoted active student involvement in institutional processes at all levels, was identified as a feature of good practice in that it secured effective

student contributions to the assurance of quality and standards [University of Nottingham, paragraph 77].

10   Several audit reports noted that in addition to participating in institutional level committees, student representatives were involved in a variety of other activities at this level, including: quality audits; the appointments process for academic and academic-related staff; and ad hoc working parties addressing student matters such as retention. In one institution the inclusion of an officer of the students' union on internal review panels was identified as a feature of good practice [Queen Mary, University of London, paragraph 66].

11   A particular feature noted in some audit reports was the establishment of specific student-focused committees, in addition to those concerned with centrally-provided services and support for students. A student affairs committee in one institution was identified as a feature of good practice in that it was a high-level body, with a capacity to address issues in great detail and to shape institutional policy to the benefit of students. An example of its achievements was a significant policy change in respect of library opening hours. The report noted that the committee's structural location, reporting to the Academic Board and the Board of Governors, as well as its achievements, meant that it was 'a significant contributor to the University's goal of placing the student experience at the heart of its activities' [London South Bank University, paragraph 74].

12   Other examples of student-focused committees included: a student liaison committee chaired by an independent governor, the purpose of which was to act as a forum for monitoring the student experience; a student affairs board, which the audit report, citing the institution's self-evaluation document, described as 'an extremely useful forum for debating pastoral issues'; and a senate-student liaison committee co-chaired by the president of the students' union, which it was argued promoted good communication between the student body and the institution. One audit report noted, however, that the work of a student experience committee, which had been established to enable students to raise concerns at the highest level, had not involved active student participation and its introduction appeared to have had little or no impact; the institution was encouraged to reflect on ways in which the committee could facilitate a two-way conversation.

13   Most audit reports indicated that, in addition to facilitating and encouraging formal student representation on committees, institutions provided many opportunities for meetings between students' union officers and senior members of academic and administrative staff. Several of the reports noted regular meetings between senior staff and sabbatical officers in formally-constituted student advisory groups; such meetings enabled the institution to deal more promptly with policy and operational issues.
In addition to formal meetings held on a regular basis, there is evidence in the reports of considerable informal contact between members of senior management teams and officers of the students' union. In one institution a Pro Vice-Chancellor met with students' union officers on a regular basis and the students were reported to welcome the opportunity to raise issues in such a forum; in another institution the officers of the student union indicated that they had good access to senior staff, both formally and informally. One report noted the effectiveness of both formal and informal relations

between senior management and officers of the students' union which included a standing opportunity for the President to contact the Vice-Chancellor 'as needs arise'. Another report found a 'close and effective' relationship between students' union officers and the institution's central administration.

14   Several of the audit reports viewed the arrangements for contact between senior staff and students as a features of good practice, notably: the openness of senior managers in engaging with students, who appreciated such contact [University of East London, paragraph 83]; and the close working relationship between senior institutional officers and the students' union sabbatical officers, including in an associated project which clearly had a positive impact on matters relating to academic quality [University of Leicester, paragraph 89]. The appointment of the president of the students' union as chair of a learning resource centre user group was identified in one report as a feature of good practice in that it promoted 'the effective communication of the student voice' [Thames Valley University, paragraph 79].

Representation at operational level

15   It appears from the institutional audit reports that student representation at operational level could take place through: programme or course committees; departmental, school or faculty committees; and staff-student liaison, consultative or advisory committees. Examples of effective systems of student representation at this level identified in the reports included:

● the clear definition of the roles of student representatives in programme and other handbooks

● supportive documentation, such as a detailed student representatives handbook

● faculty boards and programme committees with 'student matters' as a standing item on their agendas to provide students with an input into programme development, monitoring and routine management

● the inclusion of a standing item on student matters in standard model agendas for field/course committee meetings, to ensure that the student views were taken into account.

In an institution where the support given to student representatives in the faculties was identified as a feature of good practice, the chairs of school boards and other committees invited student representatives for coffee and discussion of the agenda an hour before the start of each meeting; this 'simple but effective device' was reported to have dramatically improved attendance and participation by student representatives [De Montfort University, paragraph 99].

16   It was noted in several audit reports that further opportunities were provided for student representation by means of staff-student liaison or consultative committees that in some institutions were additional to a formal system of programme committees or boards. Staff-student consultative committees where students were able to raise housekeeping, organisational and academic matters were identified by one report as a feature of good practice, especially where these bodies provided access to senior managers and where regular progress reports were provided to students [Conservatoire for Dance and Drama, paragraph 63]. In another institution,

however, where the status of staff-student consultative committees was enshrined in a Student Charter, the report found evidence of some variability in their operation between programmes; it was recommended that the requirements for convening such committees should be clearly set out and promulgated to staff and students. In another institution the staff-student consultative committees provided an opportunity for students to raise matters of interest across programmes. The establishment of such committees, however, was at the discretion of individual faculties, and the report considered that there was 'a compelling argument that the existence of such a committee would be beneficial in all faculties, not least as a means of contributing to ensuring the comparability of the student experience across the institution'.

17   Measures to improve the effectiveness of student representation at departmental level were noted in several of the audit reports and included: the chairing of staff-student committees by students; the provision of more structured opportunities for class representatives to gather student views; the display of names and photographs of course representatives on departmental notice boards and an allowance of time at the end of lectures for representatives to gather student views and subsequently to provide feedback after meetings.

18   The audit reports noted that formal arrangements for representation at operational level were sometimes supplemented by informal channels and contacts. One report cited the open-door policy of academic staff and 'the helpfulness and accessibility' of all staff as one strand of an institution's approach to achieving the student-focused culture which the audit team identified as a feature of good practice [Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, paragraphs 75]. A small number of reports noted that there may be a tension between the success of informal methods of representation and the effective operation of more formal systems. In one institution, the report noted that excellent informal discussions between students and staff had the unanticipated consequence of low student attendance at formal committees, including staff-student liaison committees. Another report, for an institution where the training of student representatives had not been a success, noted that students tended to raise issues directly with staff, and recommended that the institution ensure, in collaboration with the students' union, that those representatives were appropriately prepared for their role.

The role of students' unions

19   Institutional audit reports focused on institutions' management of academic quality and standards, and audit teams had no remit to comment on the operation of students' unions (or similar representative bodies). It would have been inappropriate, therefore, for a report to identify aspects of the work of such a body as a feature of good practice. It is clear, however, from the reports analysed in this paper, that the involvement of students' unions was often key to the success of representation, and a significant number of features of good practice were identified in this area.

20   One audit report identified as a feature of good practice the way in which an institution and its students' union had worked effectively together to improve the organisation and operation of student representation in academic departments, faculties and on institutional level committees. Aspects of this good practice included:

the joint production of guidelines by the quality office and the students' union to ensure comparability of the student experience by providing a benchmark for student representation; the establishment by the union of a forum for all elected student representatives; and the early election and training of representatives [University of Hull, paragraphs 73 to 76]. In another report good practice was found in the partnership between the institution and its students' union, which was improving student representation by, for example, devising a four-tier structure of student representation based on programme committees, staff-student liaison committees, faculty learning and teaching committees, and a student senate [University of Plymouth, paragraph 86]. A further report noted how the close working relationship between senior management and sabbatical officers had had 'a positive impact on quality management' [University of Leicester, paragraph 89].

21   One audit report found that there was effective collaboration between the institution and the students' union, and several measures had been taken which were seen to have strengthened student representation, including: the active involvement of the union in encouraging recruitment and delivering training for student representatives; the setting up of a site on the institution's virtual learning environment as a forum for representatives to exchange views; the joint publication of a comprehensive and accessible handbook for course representatives; and the wide availability of a code of practice on student representation.

22   Several audit reports commented positively on initiatives funded or supported by students' unions to enhance student representation. In one case, where responsibility for arranging student representation had been handed over to the students' union, guidance and training was provided in the form of leaflets, web resources and email updates by a full-time coordinator working in conjunction with academic schools. In another institution where the support and training of student representatives was the responsibility of the union, mechanisms included training courses, a student course representative handbook and a course representatives guide for academic staff, and an accredited course representative certificate. Further initiatives to enhance representation noted in the reports included: the introduction of payment for representatives; the provision of training and advice by a students' union education unit; and the use of funding from alumni to support training for new student representatives. Another institution and its students' union were reported to be working together 'to ensure that students filled the places allotted to them on [institutional] committees and were able to make a full contribution'.

23   A very small number of audit reports noted that institutions' work with student representative bodies could be improved. In one case officers of the students' union felt their contributions did not always meet with a positive response. The report recommended that the institution work more closely with those officers in order 'to reinforce this important relationship at the institutional level'. In another case, where student representation operated variably, and where the representative body encountered difficulty in obtaining student views, the report recommended that the institution 'provide further support and encouragement to the [representative body] and to student representatives at all levels in order that the student views can be better understood and taken into account in developing the quality strategy'.

Enhancing the effectiveness of student representation

24   According to the institutional audit reports, most institutions were aware of the challenges involved in achieving consistent and effective student representation and made efforts to improve their arrangements. There were, however, several recommendations for action in this area, including: the need to ensure better communications with student representatives, including those serving on senior institutional committees; the need to improve participation in, and monitor the effectiveness of the training provided for student representatives; and taking action to address the variability of student participation in the formal representative processes at school level. A number of recommendations focused on the need to reduce variability in the operation of student representation processes at programme level or more generally.

25   Several audit reports noted that institutions acknowledged the need to keep the systems for student representation under review and to build on good practice. There are numerous examples of initiatives designed to improve arrangements and make student participation more consistent and effective. To address concerns about low student take-up of opportunities to attend committee meetings, one institution had provided additional training and mentoring for student representatives. Another institution was reported to have identified a need to systematise the relationship with the students' union with respect to identifying student representatives and to review, with students, the most effective course committee structures. Several institutions were found to have instigated reviews of student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement or of the operation of mechanisms for the representation of students' views.

26   Some audit reports noted the introduction of incentives to enhance the student representative systems, including: accreditation for student representatives within the context of personal development plans; briefing and induction to prepare student representatives for their role and an award to recognise their contribution; and finally an award to recognise student representatives' contributions to subject boards, based on certification of their attendance by the chair of the board and a statement of the experience they had gained.

27   Regular reviews of representation arrangements are desirable to ensure that no students are disadvantaged, especially in view of the growing diversity of the student body. Several of the audit reports made specific reference to the measures taken by institutions to ensure effective representation for groups such as part-time students, joint and combined honours students, distance learning students, international students, students on collaborative courses and postgraduate taught and research students. Such measures included: an international student forum; consulting part-time students by using online forums and open staff-student meetings; and a research students' committee which one report, quoting the student written submission, described as a good example of the institution and the students' association working together 'to improve the support and representation provided to [the] diverse population of research students'. Good practice was also found in an innovative approach to student representation at postgraduate level whereby UK-based external students were invited to attend programme committee meetings

and to represent the views of students based overseas, relayed by email [University of London External System, paragraph 66].

28   Most of the audit reports commented favourably on the responsiveness of institutions to student representation and noted ways in which student participation had effected significant changes in policies and procedures. Examples of such changes included: the provision of additional support for modules and rescheduling of exams; improved access to computers in a learning centre; and longer library opening hours, increased access to computer terminals, and room changes for part-time students. It was noted in one report that the identification of instances where formal student representation had been effective would help the student body appreciate its value. The institution was encouraged to monitor the operation of some elements of its representation and to 'work with the Students' Union to establish greater confidence on the part of students in the effectiveness of the many available channels for representing their views'.

Feedback from students

29   It is clear from the institutional audit reports that institutions made efforts to collect feedback from students on their experiences, and to respond to their views. Features of good practice identified in this area included: 'the clear link between student feedback and action at all levels within the institution' [University of Central England in Birmingham, paragraphs 75 and 100]; the 'immediacy of response to student feedback provided through the student representative system...' [Henley Management College, paragraphs 76 and 78]; and the responsiveness of a further institution, at all levels, to student views [Kingston University, paragraphs 79, 137, 138 and 179].

30   It appears from the audit reports that the views of students on the quality of their learning experiences were obtained through a variety of formal mechanisms, including representation on committees at module, programme, school and faculty level and through questionnaires. Module evaluation by completion of questionnaires was found to be the most frequently used means of securing feedback on the quality of provision at programme level and in many institutions annual student satisfaction surveys were carried out to cover the provision of services at institutional level and the general learning experience. At operational level the use of the analysis of questionnaires in annual monitoring processes raised some concerns. In one institution the means by which feedback was collected at module level and the format in which it was presented was not prescribed, leading to some uncertainty about the degree of consistency in module evaluations. In another institution, formal feedback from students at module level was found to be elicited through the completion of anonymous evaluation questionnaires or through other mechanisms. Analysis of questionnaires normally remained confidential to the module tutor, and it was recommended that the institution should ensure that 'all module evaluations [be] disclosed, critically analysed and incorporated effectively into the annual monitoring process'.

31   One institution was found to have in place a protocol on student feedback setting out the arrangements for its collection and for communicating back to students those actions which had resulted. The protocol specified departments' responsibilities for coordinating student feedback on a range of different levels including individual modules, degree programmes, and elements of courses (such as year or cohort). It also set expectations for the frequency of feedback and contained recommendations on how feedback should be gathered, including extensive advice on the purposes and design of questionnaires. The periodic departmental review process provided the means to monitor compliance with the protocol, and consideration of annual monitoring reports provided a basis for the Academic Review Committee to maintain an overview of the departmental evaluation of student feedback.

32   The audit reports indicated the importance attached by institutions to the collection from students of feedback on both the conduct of their programmes and their overall experience. In one institution where formal and informal evaluation mechanisms at course level worked effectively, the systematic and integrated collection of feedback 'that would offer a coherent overview of the quality of the student experience as a whole' was recommended. Student feedback in another institution was gained systematically through an annual 'viewfinder' survey distributed in paper form and online; the survey covered both students' experiences of their award and of library services, information technology, student services and diversity awareness.

33   It appears from the audit reports that annual surveys of student satisfaction were frequently conducted electronically using virtual learning environments. In one report, an electronic, college-wide, undergraduate student on-line evaluation system (SOLE) was identified as a feature of good practice for its potential 'to contribute to quality assurance and enhancement'; student engagement with the process and the use of the results in appraisal and promotion processes were especially noted [Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, paragraphs 96 and 103]. In another institution the results of a survey, which the audit team considered 'a thorough and useful instrument for systematically gaining the views of students', were electronically disseminated across the institution.

34   Several institutions indicated in their self-evaluation documents that the use of annual internal student satisfaction surveys was being reviewed in the light of the introduction of the National Student Survey and a desire to avoid unnecessary duplication. A small number of audit reports indicated that there was some evidence of feedback fatigue, given some students' involvement in various feedback gathering mechanisms, for example the National Student Survey, internal student satisfaction surveys, students' union surveys and module and programme evaluations.

35   It appears from the audit reports that work remained to be undertaken in some institutions to 'close the loop' and to communicate back to students the actions that had resulted from the analysis of their views. The reports revealed the different ways in which students received information on the outcome of their feedback: through course handbooks; in course committee minutes via their representatives; by e-mail; and informally through contact with academic staff. In one institution, in addition to an annual report on the results of the student satisfaction questionnaire, the results of programme questionnaires were displayed on student notice boards,

together with a response from programme staff. However, students met by audit teams frequently commented that they were unaware of the outcomes of feedback given through questionnaires and surveys. In one institution, students reported that the formal feedback mechanisms to be used following the completion of module questionnaires were not always clear, although some students could identify changes that had been made to modules through contact with those taking the same modules in subsequent years. Students in one institution were reported to feel disinclined to comment on completed modules, particularly as they did not see the collective outcome of the evaluation; this had prompted the institution to consider an increased focus on staff-student consultative committees as a more responsive way of gathering student feedback, and the development of an online system for gathering such feedback and publicising the outcomes of surveys.

Feedback from graduates

36   Few features of good practice have been identified in the area of feedback from graduates. The most established procedure for gathering feedback from graduates found in the institutional audit reports involved the conduct of three institution-wide annual surveys seeking comprehensive feedback on the quality and standards of central and departmental provision: a survey of first-degree graduates and separate surveys of campus-based postgraduates and distance-learning graduates. The report considered these surveys to be thorough and informative and an evaluation of the surveys a useful mechanism for assisting the institution to make the fullest possible use of the wide range of survey results. In another institution, however, the report considered that, although the mechanisms for collecting information from graduates were helpful, the data gathered would be of greater value were they more systematically integrated into an institution-wide quality enhancement strategy.

37   At institutional level, contact with graduates was often organised through alumnus relations offices and careers advisory services. Several audit reports indicated that the development of alumnus relations was under consideration and active alumni associations based on subject areas were occasionally noted. It appears from the reports, however, that the collection of feedback from graduates is generally carried out on an ad hoc basis. Although one institution was found to be beginning the systematic development of relations with its alumni through its development office, it did not appear that the institution encouraged its students to think of this relationship as likely to extend throughout their careers. The reports indicated that institutions often used information regarding jobs taken up by graduates and further study destinations, in periodic review processes and to provide assurance that the graduates were employable.

The findings of this paper compared with its counterpart in the first series of *Outcomes...*

38   Overall, the main findings of this paper are very similar to those of its counterpart in the first series. Proportionately more features of good practice are identified in the institutional audit reports, with several relating to the effectiveness of links between senior institutional managers and officers of student representative bodies in providing channels for communication and enhancing student representation. Both papers indicate that while, on the whole, institutions are aware of the need to 'close loops' by responding promptly to feedback from students on their experiences, there is still scope for further development in the systematic collection and analysis of feedback from graduates.

Conclusions

39   Taken together, the information from the 59 institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006 suggests that institutions recognise the important contribution made by student representation and feedback arrangements to the management of quality and standards. There are many examples of successful partnerships between institutions and their student representative bodies in encouraging and supporting students to participate, both formally and informally, in quality assurance and enhancement processes.

40   There is also general recognition of the importance of collecting and responding to feedback from students, both in their programmes of study and their overall experience as learners. It appears, however, that further work remains to be done in some institutions to 'close the loop' by informing students about the outcomes of their feedback. In general, arrangements for the systematic collection, analysis and use of feedback from graduates in order to enhance the student experience are less developed.

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 of 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[1]

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[2]

Canterbury Christ Church University College[3]

University of Chester

Liverpool Hope University

University College Winchester[4]

Henley Management College[5]

Harper Adams University College

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[1] Now the University of Bedfordshire
[2] Now Buckinghamshire New University
[3] Now Canterbury Christ Church University
[4] Now the University of Winchester
[5] Now merged with University of Reading

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

American InterContinental University - London

2005-06

University of Manchester

Courtauld Institute of Art

Heythrop College

University of London External System

London School of Economics and Political Science

The University of Bolton

Thames Valley University

University of Central England in Birmingham[6]

University of Worcester

Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies

Dartington College of Arts[7]

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth

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[6] Now Birmingham City University

[7] 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 - London

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.

Outcomes... papers currently available can be found on QAA's website at 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 institutional 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 were then introduced into 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 have been 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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