



Outcomes from Institutional audit: 2007-09

Managing academic standards

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Preface

One of the objectives of Institutional audit is to 'contribute, in conjunction with other mechanisms and agencies in higher education, to the promotion and enhancement of quality in teaching, learning and assessment'. To support this objective, QAA publishes short working papers, each focused on a key topic addressed within the audit process. These papers, which are published under the general title *Outcomes from Institutional audit*, are based on analysis of the individual audit reports (for full details of the methodology used, see Appendix C).

Two series of papers, covering audits which took place between 2003 and 2006, have already appeared, together with two related series of *Outcomes from Collaborative provision audit* and *Outcomes from Institutional review in Wales*. The present series will cover the cycle of audits taking place between 2007 and 2011.¹ Some structural changes have been made to the papers for this series: in particular, rather than considering the audit process in isolation, they will place the findings from audit in the context of policy developments and other evidence, for example from the National Student Survey, and key research findings where appropriate.

The papers seek to identify the main themes relating to the topic in question to be found in the audit reports, drawing in particular on the features of good practice and recommendations identified by audit teams. Both features of good practice and recommendations discussed in the paper are cross-referenced to paragraphs in the technical annex of individual audit reports, so that interested readers may follow them up in more detail. A full list of features of good practice and recommendations relating to each topic is given in appendices A and B.

It should be remembered that a feature of good practice is a process or practice that the audit team considers to make a particularly positive contribution to the institution's approach to the management of the security of academic standards and/or the quality of provision **in the context of the institution**. Thus, the features of good practice mentioned in this paper should be considered in their proper institutional context, and each is perhaps best viewed as a stimulus to reflection and further development rather than as a model for emulation. Similarly, recommendations are made where audit teams identify specific matters where the institution should consider taking action; they rarely indicate major deficiencies in existing practice. *Outcomes* papers seek to highlight themes which emerge when recommendations across a number of Institutional audit reports are considered as a whole.

Outcomes papers are written primarily for policy makers and managers within the higher education community with immediate responsibility for and interest in quality assurance, although specific topics may be of interest to other groups of readers. While QAA retains copyright in the content of the *Outcomes* papers, they may be freely downloaded from QAA's website and cited with acknowledgement.

¹ For further information about Institutional audit, see www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/Pages/Institutional-audit.aspx

Summary

This paper analyses the findings of the audits carried out between February 2007 and June 2009 in relation to the management of academic standards. Overall, institutions' arrangements for managing academic standards were found to be robust and effective, reflected in the very high proportion of confidence judgements made.

The deliberative frameworks used by institutions to maintain oversight of the assurance of academic standards were generally sound. Clarity of roles and responsibilities, particularly where authority was delegated, was identified as important in ensuring processes operated effectively. These frameworks were complemented by the rigorous use of processes for programme approval, monitoring and review. The involvement of external parties contributed to their effectiveness, with the importance of maintaining their independence emphasised.

The Academic Infrastructure provided valuable reference points for the setting and maintaining of academic standards, enabling institutions to demonstrate their alignment with national expectations. The contribution of external examiners to the management of academic standards was effective, with the key features of the system generally transparent and rigorous. Institutions maintained central oversight of the reports submitted by external examiners, enabling overall themes to be identified and addressed.

The audit reports clearly demonstrated the commitment of institutions to providing clear and robust frameworks for the assessment of students. These frameworks aimed to ensure that all students were treated fairly and consistently within an institution. However, substantial variability remained in the provision of feedback to students. Institutions were generally making adequate use of management information, but this remained an area in which the reports indicated that there was room for improvement in practice.

The findings of this paper demonstrate development in this area in comparison with the findings of the parallel papers in the first two series of *Outcomes*. They also demonstrate that, although fully effective overall, the mechanisms in use require continuing vigilance to ensure that their purpose and operation remain both transparent and rigorous.

Context

1 This paper is based on a review of the outcomes of the reports of the 76 Institutional audits carried out between February 2007 and June 2009 (see Appendix D, page 51). A note on the methodology used to produce this and other papers in this third *Outcomes* series can be found in Appendix C (page 50).

2 The reports analysed in this paper arise from the Institutional audit process, set out in the *Handbook for Institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland* (2006).² One of the key aims of Institutional audit is:

to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of ensuring that the awards and qualifications in [higher education] are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner.

3 In this context, Institutional audit investigates an institution's management of the security of the academic standards of its awards. The audit reports cover the organisational framework for this management and more specifically the use made of external examiners, internal and external reviews, assessment policies, the reference points of the Academic Infrastructure,³ management information and other relevant topics. These areas form the main topics considered within this paper.

4 The two previous series of *Outcomes from Institutional audit* (Series 1 covering audit reports published up to November 2004 and Series 2 covering reports published up to August 2006) covered topics relating to the management of academic standards through a number of different papers.⁴

5 The judgements reached by audit teams are a key element in the outcomes from Institutional audit. One judgement is on 'the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards'. Judgements may express either 'confidence', 'limited confidence' or 'no confidence' in the institution's capacity, and audit teams may also make recommendations for action and identify features of good practice.

6 'Confidence' judgements were recorded in 69 of the 76 reports. There were no cases of a 'no confidence' judgement. In the seven cases of 'limited confidence', two related to the institution's academic provision in general, while the remainder were restricted to specific areas of provision (some or all collaborative provision, postgraduate taught provision and undergraduate provision). Eighty-one features of good practice relating to the management of academic standards and 219 recommendations were identified. A list of the features of good practice and recommendations can be found in appendices A and B (pages 30-49). The total number of recommendations and features of good practice identified is broadly in line with those quoted in the parallel papers in *Outcomes* series 1 and 2.

² www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Handbook-for-Institutional-audit-2006.aspx

³ www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/Pages/AcademicInfrastructure.aspx

⁴ www.qaa.ac.uk/ImprovingHigherEducation/Pages/published-outcomes-papers.aspx; see in particular *External examiners and their reports*; *Programme specifications*; *Programme monitoring arrangements*; *Assessment of students*; *Validation, approval and periodic review*; *Progression and completion statistics*; *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*; *Subject benchmark statements*; *Institutions' frameworks for managing quality and academic standards* and *The Code of practice in institutional audit*.

7 This paper gives only limited consideration to the management of academic standards in collaborative provision because such provision was only included within the scope of 55 of the 76 Institutional audits. Where collaborative provision was not included, either the institution had no such provision or the scale of its collaborative provision meant it would be subject to a separate audit.

8 Other differences in the nature of the institutions covered by the audit reports analysed in this paper include their overall student numbers, which varied between approximately 600 and 31,000, and the proportion of students studying at defined levels.

9 Throughout the period considered in this paper all the components of the Academic Infrastructure (including the FHEQ, the sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* published by QAA, subject benchmark statements and *Guidelines for preparing programme specifications*) were in place and provided a consistent context informing institutional operations. Although some elements of the Academic Infrastructure were subject to review and revision during the period, the changes can be considered evolutionary and are unlikely to alter the substantive approach taken by institutions or audit teams.

Themes

10 The following main themes relating to the management of academic standards emerged from analysis of the audit reports and will be discussed in this paper:

- Institutional framework for the management of standards
 - Management of delegated authority
 - Frameworks for collaborative provision
- Internal programme and course approval, monitoring and review processes
 - Programme approval
 - Monitoring and review
 - Evidence used in approval, monitoring and review
 - External involvement in approval, monitoring and review
 - Use of the Academic Infrastructure
 - Conditions attached to approval and review
 - Approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision
 - Oversight of approval, monitoring and review
- The contribution made by external examiners
 - Allocation, nomination and appointment of external examiners
 - Induction and training of external examiners
 - The roles of external examiners and their reports
 - Central oversight of the contribution of external examiners
 - External examining and collaborative provision
- The use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points
 - Other external reference points
- Policy, regulations and practice relating to the assessment of students
 - Assessment strategies and regulations
 - Assessment criteria and degree classifications
 - Conduct of assessment
 - Feedback to students on assessment
 - Assessment and examination boards

- The use made of management information.

Comments on matters relating to collaborative provision are incorporated, as appropriate, within the relevant theme.

Institutional framework for the management of standards

11 Almost 90 per cent of the audit reports make specific statements about the overall effectiveness of institution-level frameworks for the management of academic standards, and 90 per cent of those comments are positive, notwithstanding the 38 recommendations made in this area. Where the framework was not found to be effective, in four cases the doubts expressed in the report were contributory factors in the limited confidence judgements eventually reached in the audit. In contrast, 23 features of good practice were identified. The proportion of recommendations to features of good practice is roughly equivalent to that reported in the parallel papers in *Outcomes from institutional audit* Series 1 and 2. Institutional frameworks for the management of academic standards generally consist of deliberative structures along various processes and regulations. The latter are considered under the relevant later sections of this paper.

12 In the context of the management of standards some reports were prepared at a time of significant structural or other change in the relevant institutions. Most commonly, such changes were structural, including the revision of relevant committees,⁵ with overall changes in academic portfolio,⁶ the impact of institutional merger⁷ and more general developments⁸ also being mentioned. The reports indicated that such changes had not jeopardised the management of academic standards; indeed, the management of such changes led to the identification of four features of good practice.⁹ The reports also commented on the need to avoid jeopardising the robust nature of existing systems as a consequence of changes¹⁰ and on the opportunities which restructuring afforded to simplify internal processes.¹¹

Management of delegated authority

13 The description of an overarching body with ultimate responsibility for academic standards in an institution, operating through delegation to subsidiary bodies, is included in most reports. On the whole, this framework was described as effective, with only a few instances where a review of the framework was considered helpful, both generally¹² and to clarify of roles and responsibilities in particular.¹³ The audit reports identified a few instances where deficiencies in the operation of the framework were potentially detrimental to the management of standards. These centred on the effectiveness of central scrutiny and reflection when excessive loads were placed on the committee framework¹⁴ or where record-

⁵ School of Pharmacy, paragraph 40; Leeds College of Music, paragraph 23; Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 20; University of Essex, paragraphs 12-19; University of Salford, paragraph 21; Lancaster University, paragraph 4; University of Leicester, paragraph 7; University of Sunderland, paragraph 11; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 10

⁶ Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 7

⁷ University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 61; University of the Arts London, paragraph 29

⁸ Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraphs 7, 29; Keele University, paragraph 21; Bournemouth University, paragraph 7; City University London, paragraph 12

⁹ University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 29; University of the Arts London, paragraph 29; Rose Bruford College, paragraph 23; University of Sunderland, paragraph 11

¹⁰ University of Salford, paragraph 21

¹¹ University of Leicester, paragraph 7

¹² Royal Academy of Music, paragraphs 25, 27, 31, 36; University of Buckingham, paragraph 26; Liverpool Hope University, paragraphs 26, 69, 73, 91, 150; University of Northampton, paragraph 17

¹³ Leeds College of Music, paragraphs 53, 58, 59, 65; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 104

¹⁴ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 28; University of Reading, paragraph 29

keeping and reporting were considered inadequate.¹⁵ Cases were also identified with the potential to affect the institution's ability to maintain effective oversight of standards. These involved committees either not operating effectively¹⁶ or within their terms of reference,¹⁷ or when delegation of authority was ambiguous¹⁸ or respective roles and purposes were unclear.¹⁹

14 One third of the reports identified the delegation of substantial levels of responsibility for the management of standards to academic structures below institutional level (faculty or their equivalent, department or programme). In most instances where authority was delegated to faculties, the reports endorsed the operation of the relationship either implicitly or explicitly. In one instance the strengthening of the relationship was identified as a feature of good practice.²⁰ Some reports, however, considered that such arrangements could benefit from clearer definition of respective roles within the framework,²¹ fewer areas of overlap,²² more effective institutional oversight²³ and better communications.²⁴ Where delegation was to levels below the faculty, this aspect of the framework was identified as incurring actual or potential risks to the management of standards because of variability of practice across the institution.²⁵

15 Over a third of the reports identified the existence of a central institution-level office or unit as beneficial, since it could support all or some of the components of the framework that institutions had in place. Indeed, in two instances the arrangements were identified as features of good practice.²⁶

Frameworks for collaborative provision

16 Most of the reports which included discussion of an institution's collaborative provision provided broad insights into the general structural and regulatory frameworks used to oversee it. The vast majority indicated that there were formal institution-level bodies with high-level oversight of the management of the quality and standards of the provision and of awards. The framework included approval, monitoring and review processes equivalent to those employed for on-campus provision but augmented as appropriate. In almost all reports the framework was described as effective. However, in two cases alignment with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* was noted to be either clearly absent,²⁷ or in need of greater consideration.²⁸ The need for processes and reporting mechanisms that provided effective oversight of collaborative provision was commented on in one report.²⁹ The need to expedite the approval and implementation of a formulated framework in the light particularly of the recommendations arising from two previous audits was noted in another.³⁰

¹⁵ University College Falmouth, paragraph 9; Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 22; Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 14

¹⁶ Royal College of Music, paragraphs 23, 40, 47, 49

¹⁷ Institute of Cancer Research, paragraphs 9, 10, 24, 35

¹⁸ Coventry University, paragraphs 10, 22

¹⁹ London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraph 37; Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 25

²⁰ University of Bristol, paragraph 14

²¹ University of Southampton, paragraph 17; University of Surrey, paragraph 34; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraphs 16, 40, 164

²² University of Salford, paragraph 13

²³ Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 15

²⁴ Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraphs 18, 19, 22, 36, 59, 91, 101, 113; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 36

²⁵ University of York, paragraph 26; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 25

²⁶ University of Salford, paragraph 17; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 14

²⁷ Liverpool Hope University, paragraphs 20, 73, 150, 154, 155, 156, 157, 161, 169, 175, 186, 189, 191

²⁸ University of Buckingham, paragraphs 44, 105

²⁹ London Business School, paragraph 110

³⁰ Goldsmiths' College, paragraphs 64, 117

Internal programme and course approval, monitoring and review processes

17 Approximately 90 per cent of the audit reports make specific statements about the effectiveness of programme and course approval, monitoring and review processes in the assurance and management of academic standards. Of those, 90 per cent offer generally positive conclusions on this effectiveness. Many of the reports state that institutions regarded the processes in general, or individual elements within them, as key means for them to establish, secure and safeguard standards and maintain the necessary oversight. However, a small number of reports noted that key processes were either absent or in need of review. Evidence of deficiencies in this area contributed to overall limited confidence judgements. A few reports drew attention to characteristics of the processes that, in general, undermined the effectiveness of such oversight. Among these were a distinction in the effectiveness of the processes between on-campus and collaborative provision,³¹ fitness for overall purpose,³² the absence of a standards-related focus,³³ an over-burdensome or overlapping nature³⁴ and their limited capacity to identify and disseminate good practice.³⁵

18 Overall, approval, monitoring and review process were the topic of 62 recommendations and 15 features of good practice. The features of good practice covered the robust,³⁶ evaluative³⁷ and clearly benchmarked³⁸ nature of the processes and the benefit gained from the use of risk alerts³⁹ and stage gates,⁴⁰ and the capacity to capture aspects of good practice for dissemination.⁴¹ Fewer features of good practice and recommendations were identified on this topic in these 76 audit reports than in previous series of *Outcomes*.

19 An analysis of the descriptions and comments made in the reports about the individual processes of approval, monitoring and review reveals a number of features relating to the capacity of the process to contribute to the assurance and management of academic standards. These relate to the location and progression of the processes within the institutional framework; the information inputs required; elements of external scrutiny; alignment with the Academic Infrastructure required; the response to recommendations or conditions; and analytical institutional overview.

Programme approval

20 Most reports identified the separate stages of consideration of the strategic and academic aspects of the approval of new programmes, and no report questioned the institutional level at which approval was agreed. In one report the implementation of a university-level programme committee dealing with all approvals was highlighted as a feature of good practice.⁴² Although in most cases separate stages (between two and five in number) were identified, an iterative approach to the overall process management was

³¹ Aston University, paragraph 34

³² Royal Academy of Music, paragraphs 27, 31, 35

³³ Royal College of Music, paragraph 44; Royal Veterinary College, paragraphs 37, 39

³⁴ Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 130; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 43

³⁵ Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 36

³⁶ Keele University, paragraph 60; University of Cambridge, paragraph 83; University of Salford, paragraph 50

³⁷ Leeds College of Music, paragraph 81

³⁸ Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 27

³⁹ University of Exeter, paragraph 79

⁴⁰ Open University, paragraphs 46-47

⁴¹ University College London, paragraphs 51, 115, 172

⁴² University of Sheffield, paragraph 13

identified as a feature of good practice in one instance;⁴³ and the streamlining achievable through innovative use of the university's information management system was similarly noted in another.⁴⁴

Monitoring and review

21 In all the reports where it was described, annual monitoring of provision involved thorough consideration at the level of the unit delivering the provision, with progressive reporting to faculty (or equivalent) and institutional levels. In a few instances, however, delegation of authority led to reporting only to faculty level. A third of the reports described five-yearly periodic review cycles, and almost the same number described six-yearly cycles. Although a few reports described shorter cycles, no comment was made on whether these offered more secure mechanisms for assuring or managing award standards. About one-fifth of the reports discussed the relationship between periodic review and the explicit revalidation of programmes. A single process was usually involved, with decisions on whether the programme in question should continue specified as an outcome in a few reports.⁴⁵ Where parallel processes were adopted, integration of processes⁴⁶ and of the criteria used⁴⁷ were identified in the report as being worth consideration.

22 Some reports identified opportunities for improvement in the operation of processes so that they might more effectively contribute to the assurance and management of academic standards. For approval processes, these opportunities included the need for clarity of the precise locus for the approval of provision;⁴⁸ the need for full and timely committee involvement⁴⁹ and for specific advice on the treatment of joint programmes.⁵⁰ For programme monitoring, evidential consistency, clarity and pertinence⁵¹ were highlighted. Other matters identified in reports as requiring attention in order to secure effective management of academic standards were structural arrangements which emphasised units rather than programmes or which left postgraduate taught or collaborative provision outside the system.⁵² On the other hand, one report considered the operation of variable-intensity annual monitoring, the application of which was determined by a senior executive group, to be a feature of good practice.⁵³ In the case of the periodic review of provision, in terms of process, two reports highlighted the need to address adherence to the defined schedule of reviews.⁵⁴ In another report, an institution operated a review process where academic units were able to determine whether the use of a light-touch approach was appropriate to the circumstances, but no guidelines were provided on such an assessment. The report considered therefore that the level of rigour might be compromised.⁵⁵

Evidence used in approval, monitoring and review

23 The information required to support approval, monitoring and review processes is addressed in most reports. The nature of the specified key information illustrates how each

⁴³ University of the Arts London, paragraph 35

⁴⁴ University of Kent, paragraph 28

⁴⁵ University of Reading, paragraph 39; University of Kent, paragraph 32

⁴⁶ Southampton Solent University, paragraph 79

⁴⁷ Royal College of Art, paragraphs 6, 49

⁴⁸ Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 37; University of Surrey, paragraph 35

⁴⁹ University of Southampton, paragraph 25; University of Reading, paragraph 44

⁵⁰ University of Sheffield, paragraph 142; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 37

⁵¹ Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 39; Goldsmiths' College, paragraphs 46, 112; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 29; University of Birmingham, paragraph 41

⁵² Bath Spa University, paragraph 34; Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 42; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 34

⁵³ University of Sheffield, paragraph 14

⁵⁴ University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 37; University of Chichester, paragraph 52

⁵⁵ University of Greenwich, paragraphs 36-40

of the processes contributes to the assurance of academic standards. Thus, in the case of approvals, although relatively few reports identified an assessment strategy as a key input for proposals, almost half identified programme specifications, or their equivalent, as central to considerations. For annual monitoring, in nearly all of the reports where the process was discussed in detail, the content of external examiner's reports formed a key information source, as did student-related data (for example on admissions, performance, awards and retention). Many reports also indicated the consideration of student feedback in the process, alongside reports from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and from employers. Almost half the reports identified the sources used in periodic review, which were similar to those for annual monitoring. Where inadequate information was provided for approval, this was seen in the reports as potentially compromising the capacity of any scrutinising body to exercise responsibility for the establishment or maintenance of academic standards.⁵⁶ Similarly, where there was variability in annual monitoring,⁵⁷ a lack of defined consistency in the data available⁵⁸ or in engagement with requirements to consider student feedback,⁵⁹ external examiners' reports,⁶⁰ joint programme provision⁶¹ or partner institution information,⁶² the reports noted that such deficiencies weakened institutional oversight of academic standards. For periodic review, the information base used gave rise to very few negative comments in the reports, although in one case a recommendation was made about inconsistency in the use of data across faculties.⁶³ The wide range of relevant information available was considered a feature of good practice in another.⁶⁴

External involvement in approval, monitoring and review

24 Most reports noted the involvement of experts external to the institution during programme approval and review and that this contributed to the affirmation of academic standards. External involvement in annual monitoring was, however, rare. Along with qualified individuals drawn from other areas of the institution, external experts were members of panels explicitly required to advise on overall approval for a programme to begin or continue, together with any necessary conditions or recommendations. External experts were also identified as a source of advice during the design of new provision in a substantial number of reports, with a few instances where this involvement was considered to need further encouragement or clearer definition in order to preserve the impartiality of the subsequent scrutiny process.⁶⁵

25 In relation to the external element of approval panels, a few reports identified further areas for consideration. Consistency of inclusion,⁶⁶ processes for nomination and approval of external members,⁶⁷ alignment with relevant sections of the *Code of practice*,⁶⁸ the scope of the expertise represented⁶⁹ and the range of the provision included⁷⁰ were the most common. Many reports also identified that, where appropriate, representatives of

⁵⁶ Royal Agricultural College, paragraphs 29-30; Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 12

⁵⁷ Queen's University Belfast, paragraphs 41, 178

⁵⁸ Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 30, 37; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 34

⁵⁹ University College Falmouth, paragraph 30

⁶⁰ School of Pharmacy, paragraph 66

⁶¹ Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 28

⁶² Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 173

⁶³ Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 34, 63

⁶⁴ University of Sheffield, paragraph 19

⁶⁵ School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 20; School of Pharmacy, paragraph 68; Roehampton University, paragraph 52; University of Bradford, paragraph 43; University of Chichester, paragraphs 33-34; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 22; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 39; University of Sunderland, paragraph 19

⁶⁶ School of African and Oriental Studies, paragraphs 19, 153; University of Bradford, paragraph 50

⁶⁷ Southampton Solent University, paragraph 54

⁶⁸ University of Buckingham, paragraphs 35, 66

⁶⁹ University of Chichester, paragraph 104

⁷⁰ University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 23

professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and/or employers may be involved in approvals either as advisers at the design stage⁷¹ or as approval panel members. However, although such involvement was generally endorsed, a few reports noted that it created the risk of imbalancing the panel by, in effect, excluding academic members with experience of programme development⁷² or the FHEQ.⁷³

26 In relation to the involvement of external experts in programme review panels, the reports made positive comments about the inclusion or intended inclusion of student members and professional, statutory and regulatory body or employer representatives.⁷⁴ The appropriate nature and utility of external appointments was questioned in only a few cases where, for example, current external examiners were used,⁷⁵ the programme director acted as chair,⁷⁶ requirements for appointment were only partially fulfilled,⁷⁷ variable procedures with respect to the contribution of externals were in place across the institution,⁷⁸ or where more guidance was needed in respect of the seniority or experience level of nominees.⁷⁹

Use of the Academic Infrastructure

27 Reports regularly noted effective use of the Academic Infrastructure as an important set of reference points for the assurance of academic standards in programme approval and periodic review. Most identified alignment with the central elements of the Academic Infrastructure as a key requirement for the approval of new programmes, with subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ being specifically emphasised. Use of specific benchmarks for performance in relation to music and dance provision was identified as a feature of good practice in the report for one specialist institution.⁸⁰ In addition, some reports identified the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies as another key external reference point for the approval (as opposed to accreditation) process. A third of reports highlighted the explicit requirement for demonstrable alignment with the Academic Infrastructure to be considered by panels assessing periodic review submissions. A few reports, however, noted where reference to elements of the Academic Infrastructure was absent,⁸¹ informal,⁸² or where ensuring alignment with the FHEQ created a tension with an institutional desire to allow free choice of modules to students.⁸³ In this latter instance the report urged that priority be given to the systematic calibration of provision against the FHEQ, particularly in the matter of levels.

Conditions attached to approval and review

28 The processes of programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review may lead to the identification of conditions or recommendations for action. These can have a bearing on the establishment or maintenance of academic standards and their management. For approval, some reports identified how conditions or recommendations were monitored formally and responses considered prior to final approval. In a few instances reports

⁷¹ De Montfort University, paragraph 39; University of Kent, paragraph 26

⁷² Southampton Solent University, paragraph 49

⁷³ University of Bradford, paragraph 49

⁷⁴ University of Essex, paragraph 25; City University London, paragraph 27; Rose Bruford College, paragraph 50

⁷⁵ Royal College of Music, paragraph 36; Lancaster University, paragraph 28

⁷⁶ Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 31

⁷⁷ University of Bath, paragraphs 40, 42

⁷⁸ Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 35

⁷⁹ University of Sunderland, paragraph 26

⁸⁰ Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 27

⁸¹ Royal College of Art, paragraph 46; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 47

⁸² University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 28

⁸³ University of East Anglia, paragraphs 20, 22

commented on the inconsistency⁸⁴ and particularly the quality of the reporting⁸⁵ of such monitoring. For annual monitoring of provision, many reports indicated that action plans were a specific output of the process and that they were a key input into the following year's activities. A few reports indicated that ongoing scrutiny involved systematic institution-level scrutiny of the implementation of such plans.⁸⁶ In only one report was a recommendation made concerning the need to review annual monitoring processes to ensure that actions taken as a result were evaluated at institutional level.⁸⁷ Many reports identified clearly how the findings of periodic review panels were made subject to a response from the relevant academic unit and how actions in relation to any recommendations were followed up. Indeed, in only one report was the lack of a response mechanism seen as an issue,⁸⁸ with some inconsistency commented on in two others.⁸⁹

Approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision

29 A quarter of the reports identified and generally endorsed the approval, monitoring and review processes used for collaborative provision, which were substantially aligned to those operating for on-campus provision. However, in respect of programme approval in particular, there were proportionately more negative comments in relation to collaborative provision. The operation of the process was seen to affect the management of academic standards in a number of ways. These included limited integration between the respective mechanisms for management of collaborative activity and maintenance of academic standards,⁹⁰ lack of consistent rigour of implementation,⁹¹ slow completion of reports,⁹² or cases where the requirements of overseas governments were unknown,⁹³ credit/level mapping was absent⁹⁴ and where an institution's name had been associated with a partner before final approval.⁹⁵

Oversight of approval, monitoring and review

30 In relation to the contribution made by programme approval, monitoring and review processes to institutional oversight of academic standards, the reports noted the existence and value of summary reports that identified themes arising from such processes. Discussion in the reports was particularly thorough regarding the summaries produced as a result of annual monitoring. A substantial number of reports indicated that institutions used summaries of annual monitoring outcomes to identify common themes, university-level issues and features of good practice. These outcomes might be tracked through institution-level action plans,⁹⁶ provided as feedback to academic units⁹⁷ and used to focus on enhancement.⁹⁸ Such overviews were also reported to help identify academic units in need of additional support.⁹⁹ Where such an institutional overview was lacking, the report

⁸⁴ Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 32

⁸⁵ Royal College of Music, paragraph 34; University of Essex, paragraph 55; University of Lincoln, paragraphs 94, 168

⁸⁶ Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 20; Royal College of Music, paragraph 43; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 67; University of Hull, paragraph 24; University of Liverpool, paragraph 28

⁸⁷ Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 103

⁸⁸ London Business School, paragraph 38

⁸⁹ School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 190; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 38

⁹⁰ Lancaster University, paragraph 85

⁹¹ Aston University, paragraphs 78, 34

⁹² University of Liverpool, paragraph 132

⁹³ Royal Agricultural College, paragraphs 29-30

⁹⁴ Royal Agricultural College, paragraphs 29-30

⁹⁵ Loughborough University, paragraphs 163, 170

⁹⁶ University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 30

⁹⁷ University of Salford, paragraph 28

⁹⁸ Coventry University, paragraph 40

⁹⁹ Southampton Solent University, paragraphs 69, 72

suggested that this was a lost opportunity.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, a few reports highlighted the attention institutions gave to reviewing the effectiveness of their approval, monitoring and periodic review processes in general. These reviews were used to re-affirm external input and use of the Academic Infrastructure and to facilitate the use of the processes for enhancement.¹⁰¹

31 In considering aspects of the ongoing assurance of standards, almost half the reports explicitly addressed matters concerning the effectiveness of processes for the modification of programmes after initial approval. Most of these reports endorsed the clarity of definitions used to match the scope of change with the requisite level of approval and the general oversight exercised. A few reports¹⁰² noted the lack of mechanisms in place to monitor the impact of accumulated changes on quality and academic standards over the periods between in-depth periodic reviews of provision. A few reports provided evidence of the requirement for consultation with students¹⁰³ and/or external examiners¹⁰⁴ in the approval of modifications. Although some reports provided examples of institutional oversight of modifications,¹⁰⁵ other reports identified extant and potential risks to the management of academic standards in the operation of the processes. In particular, the lack of clarity in definitions,¹⁰⁶ changes being approved by those without sufficient authority¹⁰⁷ and the excessive level and inconsistency of faculty-based approvals¹⁰⁸ were noted.

The contribution made by external examiners

32 All but one report considered the external examiner systems in place in institutions to be effective and judged that the contributions made by external examiners to the assurance of academic standards, and specifically to the standards of awards, were substantial. Nevertheless, 23 recommendations were made supporting potential further improvement in effectiveness, alongside 10 features of good practice. In the one report where such support was not given, the relevant recommendation contributed to the expression of limited confidence in the management of the standards of the institution's postgraduate taught provision.

33 A third of the reports reiterated the statements made by institutions concerning the significance of external examiners and their reports to the management and assurance of academic standards. The features of the external examiner system discussed in more detail here are the nomination and approval of external examiners, the information and training they receive, their roles, tasks and reporting, the influence of the Academic Infrastructure, report submission, consideration and responses, institutional overview of reports, student access to reports and some aspects of the system as it relates to collaborative provision.

¹⁰⁰ Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 34; University of Reading, paragraph 44

¹⁰¹ University College Falmouth, paragraph 31; University of Reading, paragraph 42; Aston University, paragraph 30; Bournemouth University, paragraphs 18, 21; City University London, paragraphs 24, 29; De Montfort University, paragraph 18; University College London, paragraph 42; University of Durham, paragraph 33; University of Portsmouth, paragraph 43

¹⁰² School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 52; London Business School, paragraph 36; Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 30; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 56; University of Greenwich, paragraph 35; University of Sunderland, paragraph 24

¹⁰³ Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraph 57; Bournemouth University, paragraph 20; Lancaster University, paragraph 20; Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 17; University of Surrey, paragraph 55

¹⁰⁴ Leeds College of Music, paragraph 34; University of Surrey, paragraph 55

¹⁰⁵ Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Drama, paragraph 30; Loughborough University, paragraph 40; Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 17; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 38

¹⁰⁶ University of Chichester, paragraph 36

¹⁰⁷ Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 35

¹⁰⁸ Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 25-26

Allocation, nomination and appointment of external examiners

34 All reports discussed the allocation of external examiners to the whole range of an institution's provision, and generally this was found appropriate. In a few instances conventional external examiners were noted to be supplemented beneficially by other experts able to comment on practice and performance aspects of assessment or act as moderators ensuring parity of examination practice and the application of relevant criteria.¹⁰⁹ Over two-thirds of reports identify the publication by institutions of descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of external examiners, including the relevant aspects of assessment and the management of academic standards. Many reports also confirmed the alignment of the systems in place with the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, with one recognising the use made of external examiners in securing academic standards as a feature of good practice.¹¹⁰ Another report identified the use of the Higher Education Academy project on supporting external examiners as a reference point for a review of the system.¹¹¹ In only one instance did a report suggest that the role of external examiners at the institution was unclear and recommend that this be addressed through induction and briefing guidelines.¹¹² The role of external examiners in the approval of assessment tasks and examination papers was mentioned in a small number of reports, and, where variability in approach or operation was identified, the reports encouraged institutions to achieve greater consistency.¹¹³

35 Most reports confirm that the institutional documentation relating to external examiners sets out clear requirements for the nomination and appointment of suitable individuals to the role. In nearly all cases there was further confirmation that appointments were subject to transparent approval at institutional level, with the remainder being at faculty¹¹⁴ or school level.¹¹⁵ General endorsement of the effectiveness of the nomination and appointment procedures in securing qualified and independent external examiners was a feature of most reports. Some specifically commented upon the rigour of procedures,¹¹⁶ particularly in achieving a balance in the institutions from which external examiners were drawn,¹¹⁷ the avoidance of reciprocity between institutions¹¹⁸ and the existence of explicit provision for the removal of underperforming external examiners.¹¹⁹

36 Opportunities to improve nomination and approval procedures were identified in a few reports. The areas for consideration included clarity on the locus of authority for appointment,¹²⁰ the need for systems to identify unfilled examiner roles,¹²¹ the need for

¹⁰⁹ Royal College of Art, paragraph 66; Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraph 13; Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Drama, paragraph 36; University of Cambridge, paragraph 31; University of the Arts London, paragraph 46; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 28; University of Durham, paragraph 36

¹¹⁰ University of Chichester, paragraph 59

¹¹¹ Aston University, paragraph 36

¹¹² Royal College of Art, paragraphs 36, 43

¹¹³ School of Pharmacy, paragraph 78; Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 40; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 91

¹¹⁴ University of Salford, paragraph 30; University of Southampton, paragraph 36; University of Liverpool, paragraph 33

¹¹⁵ University of Greenwich, paragraph 42

¹¹⁶ School of Pharmacy, paragraph 59; University of Sussex, paragraph 31; Royal Veterinary College, paragraphs 43-45; University of Bristol, paragraph 38

¹¹⁷ Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 32; University of Birmingham, paragraph 47

¹¹⁸ University of Lincoln, paragraph 59; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 88; University of Birmingham, paragraph 47; University of Sunderland, paragraph 29; University of Warwick, paragraph 35; University of Winchester, paragraph 31; University of Birmingham, paragraph 47

¹¹⁹ Royal College of Art, paragraph 40; University of Bradford, paragraph 61; University of Essex, paragraph 30; University of Lincoln, paragraph 60; Coventry University, paragraph 47; Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 10

¹²⁰ University of Greenwich, paragraphs 42-43

¹²¹ University of Greenwich, paragraph 42

timely implementation of appointments,¹²² the need to avoid overcomplicated staged systems¹²³ and the need to review the criteria for the appointment of professionally-based examiners.¹²⁴

Induction and training of external examiners

37 Arrangements for providing relevant documentation to external examiners were noted in most reports: more than half of these indicated that induction events were offered at institution level. A requirement to attend such events, particularly for new external examiners, was only noted in a small number of reports,¹²⁵ although some identified the appointment of a specified mentor for new examiners.¹²⁶ One-fifth of reports noted that induction occurred at department level. In a further fifth, information was disseminated only by circulation of documentation. Features of the preparation of external examiners for their role which were highlighted in the reports included the use of the Academic Infrastructure to inform and support them,¹²⁷ the use of case studies during institutional induction events¹²⁸ and the training of an institution's own staff to become external examiners elsewhere.¹²⁹ Opportunities identified for improvement included the clarification of where induction provision was located¹³⁰ and the provision of guidance documentation for induction.¹³¹ The lack of attendance at induction was linked in one report to deficiencies in reports submitted by external examiners.¹³² Briefings taking place at department level were also identified as having the potential to produce varied levels of understanding of their roles among external examiners.¹³³

The roles of external examiners and their reports

38 Almost all the reports confirmed that external examiners were required to attend examination or assessment boards. A few recommendations were made concerning opportunities for them to make more effective input,¹³⁴ particularly in relation to decisions on joint honours awards.¹³⁵ Similarly, the production of an annual (or end of examination cycle) report was noted as an essential part of an examiner's duties in providing valuable evidence of the academic standards of awards. In only a few instances was the lack of the timely receipt of such reports¹³⁶ or the lack of procedures for the pursuit of missing reports mentioned.¹³⁷

39 The provision of templates for external examiners' reports was endorsed in most audit reports. Such templates prompted external examiners to cover not only the academic standards achieved but also their comparability to those in other institutions known to the

¹²² Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 25

¹²³ University of Buckingham, paragraph 38

¹²⁴ School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 39

¹²⁵ University of Lincoln, paragraph 60; Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 45; Middlesex University, paragraph 25; University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 28; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 21

¹²⁶ University of Leeds, paragraph 34; University of the Arts London, paragraph 45; Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 10

¹²⁷ University of Cambridge, paragraph 29; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 46

¹²⁸ University of Portsmouth, paragraph 52

¹²⁹ University of Brighton, paragraphs 43, 46

¹³⁰ University of Buckingham, paragraph 39

¹³¹ School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 41

¹³² Coventry University, paragraph 20

¹³³ University of York, paragraph 53

¹³⁴ Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 24; University of Bradford, paragraphs 59, 63; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraphs 34, 38; University of Bath, paragraphs 29, 35, 38

¹³⁵ Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 33

¹³⁶ School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 18; University of Bradford, paragraph 58; University of Salford, paragraph 31

¹³⁷ School of Pharmacy, paragraph 65

examiner. They also enabled the examiner to comment on assessment and its conduct, the conduct of examination or assessment boards, any matters relating to the curriculum and the adequacy of their preparation for their role. Templates with specific sections to allow differentiated comments on collaborative provision were noted,¹³⁸ as was the provision for outgoing external examiners to reflect on the whole period of their appointment.¹³⁹ A few reports, however, commented on the lack of a template¹⁴⁰ or the inadequacy of the prompts in relation to their capacity to elicit fully detailed or evaluative responses from external examiners.¹⁴¹

40 Audit reports overwhelmingly noted that external examiners endorsed the threshold academic standards required of students by institutions and also confirmed the overall comparability of award standards with others known to them. Moreover, where external examiner report templates were described, in all but one case¹⁴² they were noted to elicit specific comment on the standards of awards in relation to documented external reference points, particularly the FHEQ and the relevant subject benchmark statements.

41 Some reports identified the opportunities external examiners had to comment or advise on curriculum developments in their annual reports. In a few of these the opportunity to comment or advise outside the confines of the reports was seen as a positive contribution to ongoing developments.¹⁴³ However, in others the existing mechanisms for preserving the independence of judgement required of external examiners in their primary role was noted in relation to the defined range of advice solicited,¹⁴⁴ the distinctive definitions used¹⁴⁵ and by the exclusion of external examiners from involvement in new programme proposals.¹⁴⁶

Central oversight of the contribution of external examiners

42 In line with the institution-level appointment of external examiners, most audit reports also noted a central submission point for external examiner reports, with a small minority being received at departmental or programme level.¹⁴⁷ A few reports indicated the specific opportunity that external examiners had to communicate directly with the senior institutional officer or the Senate (or equivalent) on matters of particular concern, although there was no indication from reports that this had been done.¹⁴⁸

43 The processes of central submission and consideration of external examiner reports ensured that issues of both local and institutional significance could be identified. Although many reports mentioned the oversight achieved this way, only a few commented further on the extent to which such monitoring did¹⁴⁹ or did not¹⁵⁰ contribute to the identification and dissemination of features of good practice. A small number of instances were also identified where the process might have fallen below the level of expectation

¹³⁸ University of Lincoln, paragraph 64; University of Northampton, paragraph 89; University of Warwick, paragraph 38

¹³⁹ University of Lincoln, paragraph 64; University of Durham, paragraph 38

¹⁴⁰ University of Cambridge, paragraph 32

¹⁴¹ University of Bradford, paragraph 59; University of Oxford, paragraph 54; University of Portsmouth, paragraph 54

¹⁴² Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 44

¹⁴³ Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 65

¹⁴⁴ De Montfort University, paragraph 19

¹⁴⁵ City University London, paragraph 36

¹⁴⁶ Coventry University, paragraph 36; University of Leicester, paragraph 18

¹⁴⁷ University of Leeds, paragraph 37; University of Southampton, paragraph 36; Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 38

¹⁴⁸ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 20; Loughborough University, paragraph 49; University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 39; University of Exeter, paragraph 41; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 29; University of Kent, paragraph 37

¹⁴⁹ University of Lincoln, paragraph 67; University of Salford, paragraph 91; City University London, paragraph 36

¹⁵⁰ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 46

placed on it.¹⁵¹ Most reports described how, following central receipt and consideration, external examiner reports were looked at locally and responses to them generated. Most reports endorsed the processes, and in only a few instances was the effectiveness of the cycle questioned in relation to the detailed alignment of practice with requirements,¹⁵² the possibility of issues being lost in an over-complex system¹⁵³ and the limited or variable responses being provided to external examiners.¹⁵⁴ Notwithstanding these matters, no audit report noted external examiner dissatisfaction with the responses they received. However, where the mechanism for formal consideration of reports and the generation of responses to them was seen as largely absent, and as such not aligned with the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, this contributed to a limited confidence judgement.

44 In addition to the central consideration of external examiner reports, most audit reports indicated and endorsed the production of an institutional or faculty overview analysing all the comments made by external examiners in a given academic year. In addition to the general endorsement given, the practice surrounding such overviews was considered a feature of good practice in relation to their contribution to the maintenance of standards¹⁵⁵ and the pursuit of identified actions at both local and institutional levels¹⁵⁶ in a small number of reports. A significant number of opportunities for improvement were also noted. Two recommendations focused on the absence of such overviews,¹⁵⁷ while other issues for attention identified centred on the tardiness of their production,¹⁵⁸ their lack of coverage or evaluative depth,¹⁵⁹ their limited consideration at committees¹⁶⁰ and the need to address recurring issues¹⁶¹ or the dissemination of good practice¹⁶² arising from them more effectively.

45 More than two-thirds of the reports considered how visible external examiner reports were to students. A few reports noted a lack of a common institutional expectation in this regard,¹⁶³ while many others described provision for students to see the relevant reports through student-staff liaison committees or via discussion of annual monitoring at programme boards or boards of study. Forty per cent of the reports which discussed this matter raised concerns both about the mechanisms in place and their implementation. The main issues commented on were the absence or inadequacy of policy implementation,¹⁶⁴ variability in the local mechanisms adopted or permitted,¹⁶⁵ the use of summary reports¹⁶⁶ or

¹⁵¹ Royal College of Art, paragraph 44; Loughborough University, paragraph 52; London Business School, paragraphs 51, 46; University of East Anglia, paragraph 30

¹⁵² Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 34

¹⁵³ Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 41

¹⁵⁴ Keele University, paragraphs 32, 48; University of Exeter, paragraph 44; Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 27

¹⁵⁵ Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 13

¹⁵⁶ University of Sheffield, paragraphs 30, 34

¹⁵⁷ Royal College of Agriculture, paragraph 26; University of Buckingham, paragraph 43,

¹⁵⁸ London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraph 21; Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 27;

Southampton Solent University, paragraph 86

¹⁵⁹ Royal College of Music, paragraphs 26, 44; University College Falmouth, paragraph 22; University of Leeds, paragraph 38; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 50;

¹⁶⁰ Royal College of Music, paragraph 26; Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 20

¹⁶¹ University of Bristol, paragraph 41

¹⁶² University of Surrey, paragraph 64

¹⁶³ Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 42; University of Cambridge, paragraph 33; Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 50

¹⁶⁴ Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 42; Keele University, paragraph 34; University of Essex, paragraph 31; Bournemouth University, paragraph 51; Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 154; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 42; Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 12; Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 50; Middlesex University, paragraph 27; Open University, paragraph 55; University of East Anglia, paragraph 32; University of Greenwich, paragraph 46

¹⁶⁵ Loughborough University, paragraph 51; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 52; University of Birmingham, paragraph 49; University of Hull, paragraph 160; University of Oxford, paragraph 41; University of Surrey, paragraph 62

¹⁶⁶ Loughborough University, paragraph 49; University of Reading, paragraph 48; University of Northampton, paragraph 22; Open University, paragraph 57; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 39

their availability only on request.¹⁶⁷ In one instance, the provision of external examiner reports to students was considered a feature of good practice.¹⁶⁸ In another instance, where the views of students on the matter were recorded, it was indicated that students felt that the reports were of limited relevance or help to them.¹⁶⁹

External examining and collaborative provision

46 External examining systems in relation to collaborative provision, where covered in the reports, were noted to be identical or closely equivalent in many aspects to those for on-campus provision. A few reports confirmed that the same external examiners were appointed for the collaborative delivery of provision as for the on-campus equivalent.¹⁷⁰ On the whole, the arrangements for external examining in relation to collaborative provision were noted to be appropriate, but a number of recommendations were also made. These related to the lack of a defined role for external examiners in this context,¹⁷¹ lack of policy relating to examiners for provision common to on-campus and collaborative delivery,¹⁷² and lack of clear guidance on the appointment of local external examiners by a collaborative partner.¹⁷³ Two reports commented on external examiners for provision delivered in a language other than English where, although a bilingual examiner was appointed in one instance,¹⁷⁴ difficulties were identified in another which resulted in divergences from the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*.¹⁷⁵

The use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

47 All the audit reports commented on the use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. They reached positive summative judgements in all but two instances, where recommendations in the area contributed to limited confidence judgements on the management of academic standards. Eighteen recommendations and six features of good practice were identified overall on the topic.

48 Almost all the reports indicated a specific institutional locus for the consideration of elements of the Academic Infrastructure. Many indicated and endorsed the explicit incorporation of the expectations of the reference points into the institution's policy, procedural and regulatory statements. Only one instance where this was demonstrably not the case was recorded.¹⁷⁶ While the overall picture of institutions' engagement with the Academic Infrastructure was positive, a few reports encouraged more systematic approaches to engagement with it¹⁷⁷ and any ongoing changes to it.¹⁷⁸

49 In respect of specific elements of the Academic Infrastructure, almost half the reports noted the use of the FHEQ in relation to the contribution programme approval, monitoring and review processes made to the assurance and management of academic standards.

¹⁶⁷ University of Bristol, paragraphs 39, 139

¹⁶⁸ University of Chichester, paragraph 67

¹⁶⁹ University College Falmouth, paragraph 24

¹⁷⁰ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 56; Bath Spa University, paragraphs 38, 139; Keele University, paragraph 70; Roehampton University, paragraph 26; University of Exeter, paragraph 47; University of Warwick, paragraphs 39, 159

¹⁷¹ London Business School, paragraph 46

¹⁷² Southampton Solent University, paragraph 244

¹⁷³ Lancaster University, paragraphs 86, 88

¹⁷⁴ Roehampton University, paragraph 105

¹⁷⁵ Goldsmiths' College, paragraphs 108-117

¹⁷⁶ University of Buckingham, paragraph 35

¹⁷⁷ Royal College of Art, paragraph 62; Institute of Cancer Research, paragraphs 45-48, 54, 103, 133, 143; London Business School, paragraph 70, Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraphs 60-62

¹⁷⁸ University of Leeds, paragraphs 76, 79; Nottingham Trent University, paragraphs 41, 45

A few concerns, however, were expressed where there was a lack of clear evidence relating to the implementation of the relevant requirements in practice¹⁷⁹ and where there was a need to give priority to the systematic calibration of provision against the FHEQ.¹⁸⁰ One report found a lack of oversight where concerns expressed by an external examiner relating to awards at master's level had resulted in little action through programme monitoring and review, and where there was insufficient oversight to ensure such awards met the terms of the FHEQ.¹⁸¹ Similarly, many reports indicated that the use of subject benchmark statements to specifically assure academic standards at the level of programme approval had been effectively demonstrated. However, lack of evidence of this in practice was highlighted in a few cases.¹⁸²

50 A few reports also commented on the use of credit, particularly where this had caused confusion¹⁸³ or where, in particular situations, implementation had been slow.¹⁸⁴ In one case, the use of high levels of credit acquired through approval of prior experiential learning raised concern that some awards could be completed without substantive external scrutiny in relation to the relevant subject benchmark statements.¹⁸⁵

Other external reference points

51 The relationship between the Academic Infrastructure, other external reference points and the management of academic standards was considered in most reports in relation to programme specifications. Programme specifications were noted to be required for programme approval and periodic review processes. However, variability in practice in relation to the value gained from using programme specifications was raised in some reports.¹⁸⁶ In terms of the detail contained in programme specifications, reports noted the need to ensure clear and consistent links between learning outcomes and assessment,¹⁸⁷ the need for them to be specific,¹⁸⁸ to demonstrate how students can achieve the necessary standards¹⁸⁹ and be in line with the FHEQ.¹⁹⁰ The need for consistency in programme specifications, particularly for the benefit of students on joint programmes,¹⁹¹ and issues relating to their accessibility for students¹⁹² were also considered in some reports.

52 When identifying other external reference points used by institutions, 60 per cent of the reports referred to the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. In relation to the value for the management of academic standards institutions derived from relationships with such bodies, many reports describe the mechanisms in place to ensure institutional oversight of reports from external accreditation activity. Although this source of additional evidence in demonstrating academic standards is generally endorsed in the

¹⁷⁹ School of Pharmacy, paragraph 71; University College Falmouth, paragraph 34; London Business School, paragraph 56; Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 43

¹⁸⁰ University of East Anglia, paragraph 22

¹⁸¹ University of Buckingham, paragraph 45

¹⁸² Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 43; University of Buckingham, paragraph 49; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 46; University of Bath, paragraph 68

¹⁸³ Loughborough University, paragraph 57

¹⁸⁴ Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 28

¹⁸⁵ University of Hertfordshire, paragraphs 34-35

¹⁸⁶ School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 69; Bath Spa University, paragraph 45; Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraphs 19, 42; Keele University, paragraph 38; University of Leeds, paragraph 47; University of Salford, paragraph 27; University of York, paragraph 60; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 45; University of Surrey, paragraph 44; University of Leeds, paragraph 47; University of Salford, paragraph 27

¹⁸⁷ School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 69; Leeds College of Music, paragraphs 50, 54, 55;

University of Buckingham, paragraph 50; City University London, paragraph 38

¹⁸⁸ University of Leeds, paragraph 47

¹⁸⁹ University of Bristol, paragraphs 26-27

¹⁹⁰ Royal College of Art, paragraph 55

¹⁹¹ University of Chichester, paragraphs 29, 54

¹⁹² University of Lincoln, paragraph 40

reports and recognised as a feature of good practice in one,¹⁹³ a few reports identify the need for institutions to be more consistent in their oversight.¹⁹⁴ Where institution-level involvement is absent or weak, institutions were recommended to strengthen and formalise their approach¹⁹⁵ in order to secure full benefit from the accreditation of their programmes by such bodies.

53 Discussion of engagement with European higher education reference points was included in half the reports. A range of levels of engagement were identified, from none,¹⁹⁶ to awareness,¹⁹⁷ to some ongoing consideration,¹⁹⁸ to more complete consideration and defined responses.¹⁹⁹ Some reports noted the specific incorporation of the European reference points into the relevant institutional guidance,²⁰⁰ with some institutions issuing diploma supplements or having clear plans to do so at the time of the audit.²⁰¹

Policy, regulations and practice relating to the assessment of students

54 Specific statements relating to the contribution made by the policy, regulations and practice of assessment to the assurance of academic standards appeared in over 90 per cent of the audit reports, with almost all of the comments positive. Where the comments were negative, these findings contributed to judgements of limited confidence. Fourteen features of good practice were identified in this area in contrast to 58 recommendations.

Assessment strategies and regulations

55 In relation to the management of academic standards, almost half the reports noted the existence of institutional statements on the educational and organisational principles used to inform the practice of assessment. Such statements were variously referred to as assessment strategies, policies, handbooks or guides, or were incorporated into institutional learning, teaching and assessment strategies. The value of such statements was illustrated by the recommendations made in reports where they were noted to be absent, or where their

¹⁹³ De Montfort University, paragraph 64

¹⁹⁴ University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 49; University of Reading, paragraph 53; University of the Arts London, paragraph 49; City University London, paragraph 40; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 99; University of Birmingham, paragraphs 33, 63; University of Greenwich, paragraph 46

¹⁹⁵ Roehampton University, paragraph 25; University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 49; University of Buckingham, paragraph 51; Bournemouth University, paragraph 33; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 99; University of Durham, paragraph 49

¹⁹⁶ School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 62; Bath Spa University, paragraph 46; Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 45; University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 45; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 51

¹⁹⁷ University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 47; University of Surrey, paragraph 74; University of Winchester, paragraph 39

¹⁹⁸ Royal College of Art, paragraph 60; University of Bradford, paragraph 71; University of Southampton, paragraph 34; University of York, paragraph 51; Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 56; University of East Anglia, paragraph 35; University of Greenwich, paragraph 58; University of Liverpool, paragraph 38; University of Portsmouth, paragraph 62; University of Warwick, paragraph 47

¹⁹⁹ Roehampton University, paragraph 24; University of Leeds, paragraph 49; University of Lincoln, paragraph 73; Middlesex University, paragraph 32; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 59; University College London, paragraph 76; University of Birmingham, paragraph 54; University of Hull, paragraph 39

²⁰⁰ Roehampton University, paragraph 24; University of Bradford, paragraph 71; University of Lincoln, paragraph 73; City University London, paragraph 39; Coventry University, paragraph 61; De Montfort University, paragraph 15; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 59; University College London, paragraph 76; University of Birmingham, paragraph 54; University of Hull, paragraph 39; University of Liverpool, paragraph 38

²⁰¹ University of Lincoln, paragraph 32; University of the Arts London, paragraph 50; Middlesex University, paragraph 32; University of Birmingham, paragraph 54; University of Greenwich, paragraph 58; University of Surrey, paragraph 74; University of Warwick, paragraph 47

impact had been less than might have been expected.²⁰² The introduction of a relevant strategy and associated mechanisms was seen to facilitate the assurance of the comparability of academic standards across awards²⁰³ and among comparator institutions.²⁰⁴ It also helped avoid inconsistency and a piecemeal approach in contexts where achieving comparability of the experience of assessment by students was noted as important.²⁰⁵ About one-fifth of reports noted the availability of codes of practice on assessment aimed directly at students.

56 In considering the management of academic standards in the context of assessment, most reports discuss the academic regulations in place. Generally, these were considered to be comprehensive and relevant, although areas for further consideration arose where omissions occurred,²⁰⁶ there was a lack of clarity,²⁰⁷ particularly concerning what was mandatory;²⁰⁸ and where there was overcomplication.²⁰⁹ Other issues were identified relating to the variability of implementation and its impact on the equity of treatment for students. The possibility for local variation which might cause this was identified in general interpretation,²¹⁰ progression requirements,²¹¹ and allowed credit limits.²¹² In contrast, more than a third of the reports commented positively on the existence of single sets of regulations at undergraduate and postgraduate taught level. Similarly, many reports noted the high-level institutional approval required both for the approval of regulations and for any changes made to them. In one report, the fact that changes had been made without the oversight of the Senate, compromising its capacity to assure academic standards, resulted in a recommendation.²¹³

57 The existence of additional regulations operating at programme level was also commented on in many reports. The central control exercised over these was also highlighted, particularly when additional arrangements were required by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Although generally endorsed, such arrangements were seen to rely on adequate record keeping and the need to have in place mechanisms for evaluating the effect of cumulative changes.²¹⁴

Assessment criteria and degree classifications

58 In the context of equity of treatment for students and the comparability of awards, many reports generally endorsed the presence of single degree classification algorithms and commented specifically where this was not the case.²¹⁵ As such, in addition to the need for general clarification of classification rules,²¹⁶ specific issues were raised about how allowed

²⁰² School of Pharmacy, paragraph 79; University College Falmouth, paragraph 37; Bath Spa University, paragraphs 14, 50; Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraphs 24, 46; Institute of Cancer Research, paragraphs 19, 54; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraph 34; University of Bradford, paragraphs 59, 63; University of Buckingham, paragraph 53; University of Leeds, paragraph 57; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 53

²⁰³ University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 51; University of Bristol, paragraph 43; University of Liverpool, paragraph 40

²⁰⁴ Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 53

²⁰⁵ School of Pharmacy, paragraph 79

²⁰⁶ Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 52

²⁰⁷ Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 19, 21, 23, 38, 49, 50, 51, 109, 112

²⁰⁸ University of Southampton, paragraph 41

²⁰⁹ University of Surrey, paragraph 80

²¹⁰ Roehampton University, paragraph 32, Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 19, 22, 114

²¹¹ University of Bristol, paragraph 47; University of Oxford, paragraphs 60, 61

²¹² University of Warwick, paragraph 54

²¹³ Royal College of Music, paragraph 40

²¹⁴ University of Greenwich, paragraph 56

²¹⁵ Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraph 55; Leeds College of Music, paragraphs 59, 62, 65, 66, 144, 145; Loughborough University, paragraph 60; University of Bristol, paragraph 49

²¹⁶ Leeds College of Music, paragraphs 59, 62, 65, 66, 144, 145

variability could lead to inequity of classification²¹⁷ and the completion of awards in which all the intended learning outcomes had not been addressed.²¹⁸

59 Many reports drew attention to a variety of means whereby institutions were providing frameworks for the application of consistent assessment through the use of defined assessment criteria, grade descriptors and marking schemes. Where assessment criteria were discussed, most reports emphasised their institution-wide nature.²¹⁹ Other reports described institutional requirements for approval of criteria designed for use at faculty or programme level,²²⁰ or the provision of institutional models as the basis for those to be used locally.²²¹ A few institutions were encouraged to consider further the absence of such centrally determined or approved assessment criteria.²²² A few reports also commented on a range of issues relating to the detailed implementation of assessment criteria, including the need for greater consistency and confirmation of their use,²²³ clearer communication,²²⁴ and discrimination between levels in undergraduate study.²²⁵ Where mentioned, the reports supported institutions' actions in making assessment criteria available to students. This was seen as a feature of good practice in two reports.²²⁶ There were a small number of instances where the accessibility of the criteria was questioned,²²⁷ while a few reports noted that students had criticised the clarity of assessment criteria and had suggested that this limited their understanding of and confidence in using them.²²⁸ Other reports, however, noted that students had found assessment criteria both clear and useful.²²⁹

Conduct of assessment

60 More than half the reports address matters relevant to the conduct of assessment in the context of its security, probity and equity. The use of double marking was endorsed in some reports, but it was also noted that, where local policies on its use were in operation, this could lead to variability and consequent confusion among students.²³⁰ The use of anonymous marking was noted in some reports. One report commented on the rejection of anonymity²³¹ while another recommended that the institutions should make a decision on the matter.²³² Where centrally operated or centrally endorsed mechanisms for dealing with extenuating circumstances were in place, the consistency achieved received favourable comment in some reports, when necessary information was clear and accessible to students²³³ and the mechanisms to ensure confidentiality could be made secure.²³⁴

²¹⁷ University of Bristol, paragraph 47; University of Greenwich, paragraph 56

²¹⁸ Loughborough University, paragraphs 57, 64; University of Leicester, paragraph 29

²¹⁹ Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 28

²²⁰ Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 60; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 46; University of Bristol, paragraph 46

²²¹ Aston University, paragraph 32; University of Exeter, paragraph 65; Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 38

²²² London Business School, paragraph 59; University of Bradford, paragraph 79; University of Surrey, paragraph 86

²²³ Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 41; University of Exeter, paragraph 65; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 70; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 41

²²⁴ University of Cambridge, paragraph 49; University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 45

²²⁵ University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 45

²²⁶ Royal College of Music, paragraph 54; University College London, paragraph 88

²²⁷ School of Pharmacy, paragraph 78; Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraphs 29, 42, 46, 47; University of East Anglia, paragraphs 38-39

²²⁸ University of Exeter, paragraph 61; University of Sussex, paragraph 41; University of York, paragraph 69; University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 45; University of Surrey, paragraph 85

²²⁹ University of Hull, paragraph 45; University of Portsmouth, paragraph 68; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 36

²³⁰ Keele University, paragraph 46; University of Bradford, paragraph 78; University of Exeter, paragraph 72; University of Birmingham, paragraph 57; University of East Anglia, paragraph 40

²³¹ Bournemouth University, paragraph 34

²³² Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 30

²³³ Southampton Solent University, paragraph 286

²³⁴ Institute of Cancer Research, paragraphs 19, 51

61 In relation to the submission of student work, a few reports highlighted the mechanisms institutions used to systematise it,²³⁵ with the need to manage the security of the submission and returns procedures and ensure consistency being raised by one report.²³⁶ Similarly, some reports discussed aspects of policy relating to submission deadlines and the penalties for late submission. The reports indicated that, usually, there were central institutional policies and regulations, with the use of such systems facilitated by online submission being considered a feature of good practice in one instance.²³⁷ However, the absence of a systematic approach²³⁸ and a small number of implementation issues were also identified as needing attention,²³⁹ particularly in respect of students on joint programmes.²⁴⁰

Feedback to students on assessment

62 The feedback given to students on their assessed work was discussed in a number of reports. Most noted the existence of institutional policies, regulations, guidelines, codes of practice, or targets. Approximately a third of the reports where it is discussed noted the positive impact of these initiatives on the quality and timeliness of assessment feedback.²⁴¹ In the remaining two thirds, reports noted a failure, in practice, to achieve the targets established by policy.²⁴² Similarly, institution-wide approaches to the threat plagiarism may pose to academic standards and equity are highlighted in some reports, with features of good practice identified in three.²⁴³ On the other hand, the need for authoritative²⁴⁴ and consistent²⁴⁵ guidance on the topic was also highlighted.

63 The load and timing of assessment was considered in some reports. These reports identified that specific institutional policies, guidance or tariffs were in place to ensure an appropriate assessment experience for students in some cases,²⁴⁶ with the matter addressed at programme approval in others.²⁴⁷ A few reports indicated the absence of policy on the subject and the continued bunching of assessments and their associated deadlines for students²⁴⁸ and in particular for those following joint programmes.²⁴⁹

²³⁵ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 59; University of Southampton, paragraph 40; Bournemouth University, paragraph 34; University of Sunderland, paragraph 40

²³⁶ University of Portsmouth, paragraph 69

²³⁷ University of Essex, paragraph 41

²³⁸ University of Cambridge, paragraph 57

²³⁹ University College London, paragraph 84; University of East Anglia, paragraph 42

²⁴⁰ University of Birmingham, paragraph 62

²⁴¹ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 62; University of Leeds, paragraph 54; University of East Anglia, paragraph 38; University of Surrey, paragraph 83; University of Winchester, paragraph 42; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 37

²⁴² Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraphs 68-69; University of Brighton, paragraphs 38, 77, 90; University of Chichester, paragraph 71; University of Salford, paragraph 41; City University London, paragraph 57; Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 50; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 64; University of Northampton, paragraph 58; University of Portsmouth, paragraph 69; University of Sunderland, paragraph 40

²⁴³ University of Essex, paragraph 42; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 51; University of East Anglia, paragraph 43

²⁴⁴ Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 51

²⁴⁵ Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 75

²⁴⁶ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 62; University of Southampton, paragraph 40; Bournemouth University, paragraph 34; Coventry University, paragraph 65; De Montfort University, paragraph 31; University of Hull, paragraph 42; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 53

²⁴⁷ Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraphs 26, 52; Leeds College of Music, paragraph 31; University of Lincoln, paragraph 80; University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 38

²⁴⁸ Roehampton University, paragraph 31; University of Brighton, paragraph 68; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 37

²⁴⁹ University of East Anglia, paragraph 41; University of Northampton, paragraph 25

Assessment and examination boards

64 More than half the reports discussed the pattern and operation of assessment or examination boards. The structural and operational approaches described were in general endorsed as compatible with their contribution to the assurance and management of academic standards. Structurally, two-tier boards were most commonly adopted, and the tiers were distributed between module or subject boards and programme (award) boards, with a small number of programme boards and institution-wide boards providing a means of considering equity across the institution.²⁵⁰ Reports considered other means of achieving such oversight, including institution-level committees which took a further, and sometimes third-tier, comparative oversight of operations and outcomes from assessment boards.²⁵¹ Where two-tier arrangements were in place, most reports confirmed the attendance of external examiners at both levels. A few reports commented adversely on departures from this practice when external examiners attended at only one level,²⁵² did not have an obligation to attend the upper-tier board²⁵³ or where attendance was not consistent²⁵⁴ or clearly evidenced.²⁵⁵

65 Single-tier assessment or examination board operations were identified in a few reports.²⁵⁶ Structurally, such arrangements did not attract negative comment, partly because in some cases mechanisms were in place to provide additional and effective scrutiny of operations and academic standards. These included an institution-level standards scrutiny committee,²⁵⁷ the provision of reports to an institution-level committee by independent board chairs²⁵⁸ and the submission of minutes and the use of the institution's management information system to highlight anomalies and provide award profiles for scrutiny.²⁵⁹ However, some reports noted that it was unclear how a single-tier board could ensure full and appropriate external examiner involvement where joint programme awards were concerned.²⁶⁰ In a second instance small subgroups of the single-tier board were reported to operate in the absence of external examiners and without quoracy rules.²⁶¹ A small number of reports, within the context of general endorsement, commented on single specific aspects of the operation of assessment or examination boards, including issues of attendance,²⁶² decision recording,²⁶³ the detailed use of discretion,²⁶⁴ the use of management information,²⁶⁵ and the alignment of practice with the detail of regulations.²⁶⁶ Further reports commented positively on boards from across the institution which met in order to identify

²⁵⁰ School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 10; University of Chichester, paragraph 70; Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 10; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 44

²⁵¹ University of Lincoln, paragraph 58; University College London, paragraph 55; University of Hull, paragraph 44; University of Surrey, paragraph 32

²⁵² Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 17; Leeds College of Music, paragraph 150; University of Bristol, paragraphs 47-48

²⁵³ Loughborough University, paragraph 48

²⁵⁴ University of Bradford, paragraph 63

²⁵⁵ Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 28

²⁵⁶ School of Pharmacy, paragraph 79; London Business School, paragraph 61; University of Leeds, paragraph 55; University of Southampton, paragraph 35; De Montfort University, paragraph 20; Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 12; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 110; University of Birmingham, paragraph 61; University of East Anglia, paragraph 46

²⁵⁷ Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 12

²⁵⁸ Southampton Solent University, paragraph 110; University of Birmingham, paragraph 61

²⁵⁹ University of Leeds, paragraph 55

²⁶⁰ Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 12

²⁶¹ University of East Anglia, paragraph 46

²⁶² Institute of Cancer Research, paragraphs 19, 53

²⁶³ Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 36

²⁶⁴ University of Durham, paragraph 56

²⁶⁵ Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 34

²⁶⁶ Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 49

good practice²⁶⁷ and on the support given to board chairs and members through collective briefings.²⁶⁸

The use made of management information

66 All but two of the reports commented on the overall effectiveness with which institutions were using management information, and in almost all cases a general endorsement of such use was provided. Where comment was less favourable, the institutions were recommended to make more effective and purposeful use of management information, particularly in programme monitoring and review, in order to further assure the management of academic standards.²⁶⁹ The reports, overall, identified 13 features of good practice in the use of management information in the management of academic standards, and made 20 recommendations.

67 The provision of relevant data from central sources for use throughout the institution was referred to in half the reports. Technical shortcomings in information provision were identified as a concern in a few reports, where institutions were still working on the implementation of reliable data systems,²⁷⁰ or where the training of staff in the transfer and use of data was needed.²⁷¹ A few reports also highlighted remaining tensions for users of centrally provided information with respect to the adequacy and quality of the data provided,²⁷² with particular attention being drawn to specific issues with respect to data relating to collaborative provision²⁷³ or specific student groups.²⁷⁴ By contrast, the effectiveness of the general provision of data was also identified as a feature of good practice in a few reports,²⁷⁵ including aspects of data relating to collaborative provision.²⁷⁶

68 When the use to which the available data was put was considered, three quarters of the reports noted that data, including that related to student progression and completion, was used effectively in the monitoring and review of academic programmes. A variety of strengths of such use in support of the management of academic standards were identified. These included the use of relevant key performance indicators,²⁷⁷ faculty benchmarks,²⁷⁸ risk alerts,²⁷⁹ a central progression analysis tool,²⁸⁰ management information to determine the intensity of the monitoring process²⁸¹ and a generally extended range of data to support the monitoring and review of provision.²⁸² On the other hand, other reports raised issues with

²⁶⁷ Aston University, paragraphs 33, 52

²⁶⁸ School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 39; University of Brighton, paragraph 72; Coventry University, paragraph 27; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 49; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 108; University of Birmingham, paragraph 61; University of Durham, paragraph 55; University of Sunderland, paragraph 38

²⁶⁹ Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 56; Royal Academy of Music, paragraphs 49-50; School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraphs 72-75

²⁷⁰ University of Buckingham, paragraph 58; University of Cambridge, paragraphs 60, 64; University of Southampton, paragraph 44; University of Surrey, paragraph 90

²⁷¹ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraphs 22, 70; Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 34

²⁷² Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 68; Bath Spa University, paragraph 53; City University London, paragraph 48; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 53; Lancaster University, paragraph 45; Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 55; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 83; University of East Anglia, paragraph 51

²⁷³ Lancaster University, paragraph 93; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 85

²⁷⁴ University of Salford, paragraph 42

²⁷⁵ Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 46; Roehampton University, paragraph 49; University of Sunderland, paragraph 44; University of Warwick, paragraph 194

²⁷⁶ Bath Spa University, paragraph 54

²⁷⁷ University of Exeter, paragraph 76; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 121

²⁷⁸ University of Durham, paragraph 62

²⁷⁹ University of Exeter, paragraph 76

²⁸⁰ University of Kent, paragraph 49

²⁸¹ University of Sheffield, paragraph 46

²⁸² Bath Spa University, paragraphs 36, 85, 89; University of Salford, paragraph 44; University of Kent, paragraphs 28-29

respect to the effectiveness of the use of data in support of programme monitoring and review. In a few reports the absence of consideration of data was seen to hamper the management of academic standards through monitoring and review.²⁸³ The most frequent concern was variability in the effectiveness of the use and analysis of data across the academic units of institutions. There was concern that this would limit the usefulness of the processes in contributing to the institutional overview of academic standards.²⁸⁴

Other opportunities for improvement identified included: the collection and use of data for more than a single year so that trend analysis could form part of the discussion of academic standards,²⁸⁵ the limitations imposed by manual data compilation²⁸⁶ and the level of integration of critical statistical analyses into quality and standards processes in general.²⁸⁷

69 Most reports addressed the consideration of relevant management information, including student data incorporating progression, achievement, admission and retention figures, by institution-level committees. In all cases, reports were positive about the use being made of data by institutions and the general contribution this made to the effective management of academic standards. A few reports identified areas of specific additional value that arose from such consideration. The consideration of data by committees or special groups set up for the purpose allowed new issues to be identified and action plans to be formulated,²⁸⁸ with specific examples being noted in the areas of new programme development,²⁸⁹ learning support strategies,²⁹⁰ progression and retention²⁹¹ and the support needs of identified student groups.²⁹² The use of statistical data at assessment or examination boards received attention in fewer reports. Although the reports were generally positive, with the disaggregation of collaborative data, allowing partner-based issues to emerge, being highlighted,²⁹³ a few minor issues related to data deployment,²⁹⁴ differing departmental practices²⁹⁵ and the use of local data²⁹⁶ were noted in this context.

70 When considering the overall support which effective data provision and use made to the local and institutional management of academic standards, most reports reached clear conclusions. Two thirds gave unqualified support, while the remainder identified potential improvements. Broadly, these related to an inadequacy of data,²⁹⁷ the need for improvements to management information systems so that their more effective operation

²⁸³ School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 73; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 36; University of Surrey, paragraph 93

²⁸⁴ School of Pharmacy, paragraph 81; Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 68; Bath Spa University, paragraph 53; Keele University, paragraphs 24, 41; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraph 38; Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 49; University of Lincoln, paragraph 85; University of the Arts London, paragraph 37; University of York, paragraph 75; City University London, paragraphs 26, 51; Lancaster University, paragraphs 30, 44-45; Middlesex University, paragraph 20; University of Birmingham, paragraph 63; University of Bristol, paragraph 58; University of East Anglia, paragraph 51; University of Northampton, paragraph 26; University of Warwick, paragraph 60

²⁸⁵ University of Lincoln, paragraph 53

²⁸⁶ University of Oxford, paragraph 64

²⁸⁷ University of Lincoln, paragraph 85

²⁸⁸ Bath Spa University, paragraph 15; Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 31; Middlesex University, paragraph 37; University of Hertfordshire, paragraphs 45, 47

²⁸⁹ University College Falmouth, paragraph 46

²⁹⁰ University of Sunderland, paragraph 44

²⁹¹ Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 46

²⁹² Aston University, paragraph 58

²⁹³ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 22

²⁹⁴ Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 60; University College Falmouth, paragraph 44; University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 59; City University London, paragraph 50; University of Bristol, paragraph 59

²⁹⁵ Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 34

²⁹⁶ Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 47

²⁹⁷ Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 21; University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 58; University of Buckingham, paragraph 59; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 83

could be achieved,²⁹⁸ and limitations in the use institutions made of management information as a whole.²⁹⁹

The themes in context

71 The themes discussed above reflect directly not only the methodology and scope of Institutional audit but also the advice given to institutions with regard to the evidence they should provide in the briefing papers they prepared as part of the process. As such, the expectations of both audit and the external reference points that define threshold academic standards nationally were clear and not subject to substantive modification during the period of this review. Audit reports were able to provide summative answers to a set of clearly defined questions: did institutions have effective frameworks for the management of academic standards; did they use external examiners effectively to confirm academic standards, and so on. The analysis in this paper was able to identify the general answers to such questions across the reports, reflect on the qualifications put on them and identify instances of good practice worthy of sharing.

72 This paper, therefore, in contrast to the separate papers in previous series of *Outcomes*, has been synoptic, considering overall outcomes rather than dwelling on the evidence used by reports to reach their conclusions.³⁰⁰ Nevertheless, it serves to illustrate the wide base of information and evidence that both institutions and audit teams used when considering the management of academic standards. In the period considered and subsequently, the need to demonstrate effective management of academic standards has become increasingly important and has been under greater scrutiny, not least from students. In this respect the Academic Infrastructure has remained a key set of reference points.

Trends

73 Trends have been considered in comparison to the findings of the papers in the previous series of *Outcomes*. Previous considerations of institutional frameworks for the management of academic standards have identified a concern with the lack of clarity in the location and exercise of responsibility for parity in assessment and particularly the classification of degrees. Such concerns appear less acute in the reports analysed in the current paper, with an apparent growth in clarity of assessment principles and regulatory harmonisation. A specific issue relating to the assessment of students running in common through both previous series and the current paper relates to variability of practice. The clarity of assessment criteria and their use appeared to have increased over the period, with the identification of fewer exceptions in the current paper. Similarly, there was much less emphasis in the 76 reports considered here on the adherence to disciplinary traditions that was commented on previously. A theme arising in previous analyses was concerns about the use of assessment board discretion in the determination of award classifications and progression. This issue is much less prevalent in these reports, with regulatory clarity and the more systematic use of cross-institutional classification algorithms being potential contributors to this shift. Feedback to students on their assessed work has remained a matter for comment throughout the period. Although awareness of the issue has appeared to grow, particularly through the formulation of institutional policy, in the audit reports analysed in this paper the impact of such developments was limited, with intention still running ahead of achievement.

²⁹⁸ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 70; Keele University, paragraph 41; Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 37; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 82; University of East Anglia, paragraph 49

²⁹⁹ London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraph 38; Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 50; University of Buckingham, paragraph 59; University of Cambridge, paragraph 64

³⁰⁰ Some of these aspects will be considered in more detail in other papers in this series of *Outcomes*; see Appendix E.

74 In relation to the contribution of programme approval, monitoring and review processes to the management of academic standards, the continued importance such processes have is apparent. The range of information reported on has become more comprehensive and systematic. Variability of the depth of consideration, although less prominent as an issue, still remained greater than might be ideal. The contribution of external experts to such processes appeared to be a more widespread and systematic expectation and its implementation more clearly demonstrated in the current audit reports than previously. The use of external benchmarks has remained central to the management of standards throughout, with such use, including in the formulation of programme specifications, becoming a more explicit institutional expectation. Likewise, the systematic use of the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements is more clearly demonstrated in the more recent reports, with the explicit expectations placed on their use by external examiners appearing to impact positively on the contribution they make to the assurance of standards. Although most elements of the external examiner systems in place in institutions have remained constant and effective over the period, the roles and responsibilities of external examiners appear to be more explicitly stated and understood than hitherto, with the cycle of response to their comments becoming more dependable. Finally, although the need for further progress was identified in the most recent reports with respect to the provision and use of management information in the management of academic standards, analysis of successive *Outcomes* papers on the topic reveals a continuing trend of improvement in institutional capability.

Conclusions

75 From the current analysis of the reports of the Institutional audits carried out between February 2007 and June 2009, it is clear that, given the variety of the sometimes overlapping mechanisms used by institutions for their assurance, academic standards are generally secure and comparability with the accepted external reference points assured. The 76 Institutional audit reports provide a picture in which institutions use detailed approaches that not only seek to demonstrate the security of their management of academic standards clearly, but are also compatible with their individual styles and cultures. This paper identifies the key evidence relating to the effectiveness of this management of academic standards, and strengths and weaknesses which may further illuminate opportunities for enhancement, both generally and locally.

76 In relation to the deliberative frameworks used by institutions to maintain oversight of matters germane to the assurance of academic standards, the reports in general found these to be sound, with the importance of clarity and operational fidelity in relation to both purpose and roles being the key requirements to ensure rigour and effectiveness. Similarly, although transparent delegation within such frameworks was often appropriate, the need for clear institutional oversight remained paramount, with defined administrative support adding strength. The need for clarity of purpose, together with a rigour of definition and operations, remains the aim in the management of academic standards in relation to collaborative provision.

77 Such operational and deliberative frameworks provided the context within which key mechanisms were used by institutions to demonstrate the general security of their management of academic standards. Overwhelmingly, the combined force of these mechanisms provided a range of complementary evidence well able to demonstrate both internally and externally that academic standards were secure and comparable, in the context of clearly defined national expectations. As part of this, institutional reliance on programme and course approval, monitoring and review processes was generally well placed. The processes described were mostly transparent and clearly located in the overall

framework, with progressive and effective upward reporting and consideration. The detailed exceptions that were noted emphasised the need for greater consistency of operational and evaluative rigour. The processes concerned with the assurance of standards were generally more effective than were those related to the identification and dissemination of good practice, although some significant progress was discernable in this latter regard. In particular, the relevance of the evidence used and the involvement of external parties in such processes were central to their effectiveness, as was the high level of engagement required from all involved. The value provided by external parties was clear, and the reports emphasised the need for scrupulous attention to the maintenance of their independence. Similarly, the value of the Academic Infrastructure in supplying benchmarks for the consideration of academic standards was clearly demonstrated. This, together with input from other external sources, showed the commitment of institutions to the demonstration of alignment with collectively approved expectations in their management of academic standards. Approval, monitoring and review processes were generally found to be less effective in relation to collaborative provision.

78 The contribution from external examiners was found to be a central element in the management of academic standards and was, in general, both relevant and effective. The key features of the system were mostly transparent and rigorous. The induction of examiners was still variable, although there was little or no evidence of dissatisfaction among examiners in relation to their preparation for the role. The value of external examiners in the management and assurance of academic standards was demonstrated by their engagement with the process in general and in the comprehensive reports they produced, which generally aligned their positive judgements with the reference points offered by the Academic Infrastructure. Central oversight of reports was clear, although there remain opportunities for the themes that emerge from them to be more effectively addressed. As before, the capacity of institutions to respond to issues raised was generally greater than their effectiveness in disseminating the good practice identified. At the time, systematic provision of external examiner reports to students was an emerging practice. Although most institutions had an articulated policy for this, variability or inadequacy of implementation was widespread. Similarly, although generally endorsed for their contribution to the management of academic standards, the operations and policy surrounding the involvement of external examiners in collaborative provision were sometimes lacking in demonstrable rigour.

79 Institutions' commitment to the articulation and maintenance of their academic standards through the regulatory and operational frameworks relating to the assessment of students was clearly demonstrated by the audit reports. The establishment of strategic and policy statements encapsulating integrated approaches to the principles and practice of assessment was able to play a clear role in securing the management of academic standards with regard to fairness to students and the equivalence of awards. Strong regulatory frameworks with few lapses were evident, with clear relationships between central and local regulations. Confidence in the means of determining degree classifications was generally evident. Institutions increasingly employ and publicise accessible assessment criteria, both centrally and locally. The introduction of more centralised policy in relation to a wider range of assessment practices (including the treatment of extenuating circumstances and penalties for plagiarism) also appeared to be supporting greater consistency of treatment of students. However, the implementation of institutional policy with respect to the provision of feedback on assessment to students was an area where practice still lagged behind intention. Examination or assessment boards were generally well structured and their output and practice was subject to effective institutional oversight. This transparency, taken together with regulatory clarity, was endorsed as a foundation for effective decision making, with the exercise of discretion being a minor issue in the instances reviewed here.

80 The provision of management information to support the maintenance of academic standards was generally adequate. However, this was an area of difficulty for some institutions. Reports noted a number of strengths, but variability in approaches to the use of data was still evident at levels below the institutional.

Appendix A: Features of good practice relating to managing academic standards

Institutional framework for the management of standards

- the comprehensive and accessible Quality intranet pages that contribute significantly to the effective communication of policy and procedures to staff (Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 23)
- the University College's considered and measured approach to managing the process of merger which has, through the careful management of risk and judicious prioritisation of action, ensured the maintenance of standards and quality (University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 61)
- the clarity and accessibility of documents that describe the University's processes and procedures for quality assurance (University of Brighton, paragraph 33)
- the 'Annual Conversation' with faculties and service departments, as part of the annual planning cycle, which has the potential to contribute to the effective management of programmes (University of Lincoln, paragraphs 16, 155)
- the range and depth of the Academic Audit Committee's investigations into the effectiveness of the University's policies and procedures, its independence in choosing areas for audit, and its authority and status as a committee of Senate (University of Salford, paragraph 12)
- the University's action to ensure that the Procedures and Policies for Academic Quality Assurance: Programmes and Students (AQA) continues to be a robust and increasingly accessible foundation of its quality framework (University of Salford, paragraph 16)
- the establishment of the Academic Quality and Standards Unit and its continuing work contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the University's management of standards and quality management and that the practice of reviewing the impact and effectiveness of new or significantly revised quality assurance procedures after the initial year is a feature of good practice (University of Salford, paragraph 17)
- the regular updates for members of the Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee on national issues and debates on higher education collaborative matters (University of Salford, paragraph 101)
- the thorough and systematic procedures for quality assurance which are characterised by a high degree of self-reflection and a rigorous cycle of follow-up actions (University of Sheffield, paragraphs 13 to 23)
- the University's management of the merger with Wimbledon School of Art (University of the Arts London, paragraph 29)
- the University's planned, systematic and reflective approach to the review of its processes and structures (Bournemouth University, paragraph 17)
- the planned and strategic review of the committee structure and the inclusive and effective manner in which its findings were implemented (Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 6)
- the meticulous tracking of actions through the committee system (Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 8)
- the comprehensive nature and clarity of the Academic Quality and Standards Handbook and the way in which its currency is maintained (Nottingham Trent University, paragraphs 17, 19, 26)
- the rapid and effective embedding of the College's new academic and committee structure (Rose Bruford College, paragraph 29)

- the quality, clarity and accessibility of published guidance for staff and students (University College London, paragraphs 29, 35, 54, 88, 96, 138, 156, 194, 201 and 215)
- the thorough and reflective approach undertaken throughout the process of organisational change (University of Birmingham, paragraph 20)
- the move towards a firm oversight at institutional level of the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities through the implementation of authoritative guidance on University policy and regulation, combined with well-conceived organisational changes (University of Bristol, paragraph 20)
- the contribution of the Academic Support Office to the management of quality and standards (University of Durham, paragraph 21)
- the arrangements for the operation of collaboration provision, particularly the work of the central Partnerships Office, which support the sound management of academic standards and the enhancement of quality in the partner institutions (University of East Anglia, paragraph 138)
- the range of information designed to make the University's Quality and Standards Framework more accessible to all types of staff, including the Implementation Guides, Quality and Standards Updates and 'Working with...' series of leaflets (University of Hull, paragraph 19)
- the delivery of a clear academic strategy, supported by structures which define responsibility and accountability (University of Sunderland, paragraphs 11, 100)
- the active engagement by the Quality and Academic Standards Division in the academic work of the University, which contributes to the security of academic standards and to the assurance of academic quality across the University (University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 14)

Internal programme and course approval, monitoring and review processes

- the new process for Annual Strategic Review; the strategic focus of which makes an important contribution to the institutional management of the quality of learning opportunities and of academic standards (University College Falmouth, paragraph 31)
- internal quality audit as a robust and effective process of periodic review (Keele University, paragraphs 42, 81)
- the annual programme evaluation process as a mechanism for annual course review (Leeds College of Music, paragraph 81)
- the progressive development of management information relevant to all levels of activity, from programme annual reviews to the implementation of institutional strategies (Roehampton University, paragraph 49)
- the institution's procedures for benchmarking of programmes at validation (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 27)
- the robust approach taken in the periodic learning and teaching review process (University of Cambridge, paragraph 83)
- the robust and thorough processes for the annual review of programmes; their oversight at school, faculty and institutional levels and the commitment to provide institutional-level feedback on the issues identified from overview reports (University of Salford, paragraph 50)
- the distinctive and innovative approach to the annual monitoring of teaching and learning, which draws on a range of performance indicators to determine the level of scrutiny to be applied to individual departments (University of Sheffield, paragraphs 14 to 18)

- the University's iterative approach to the process of validation (University of the Arts London, paragraphs 35, 61)
- the annual review days held in November which draw upon the annual programme review process as part of finalising the Institutional Quality Report (Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 74)
- the clarity and operation of the Stage Gate process for developing, monitoring and reviewing courses and awards (Open University, paragraphs 46-47)
- the system for bi-annual programme monitoring and its contribution to quality assurance and enhancement (Rose Bruford College, paragraphs 48, 90, 163)
- the Internal Quality Review process, especially its capacity to capture aspects of good practice for institution-wide dissemination (University College London, paragraphs 51, 115 and 172)
- the way in which faculty quality assurance teams are used in promoting the consideration within faculties of common themes related to quality and standards, thereby raising awareness of relevant University policies, as well as facilitating the dissemination of good practice (University of Bristol, paragraph 70)
- the design and systematic use of the annual Quality Assurance Template (University of Oxford, paragraph 89)

The contribution made by external examiners

- the central register of external examinerships held by staff to avoid reciprocity (School of Pharmacy, paragraph 59)
- the contribution to staff development and enhancement of practice made by the annual workshop to prepare staff to be external examiners (University of Brighton, paragraph 46)
- the use made by the University of the external examiner system in securing the standards of its awards (University of Chichester, paragraph 59)
- the role of the External Examiners Committee in supporting the external examiner system (University of Lincoln, paragraph 67)
- the identification of good practice in the induction of external examiners in one school leading to its adoption at University level (University of Salford, paragraph 91)
- the procedures for consideration of external examiners' reports, which secure the requisite central overview and action in response to issues, both at the local level and those with university-wide implications (University of Sheffield, paragraphs 30 and 34)
- the use of the summary overview of external examiners' reports to contribute to the maintenance of standards and the enhancement of learning opportunities (Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraphs 13, 19, 69)
- the rigour of the external examiner nomination process for both taught and research degree provision; the thorough induction and briefing provided by the College for its external examiners, and the well-informed annual External Examiners Forum (Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 55)
- the rigorous and systematic approach taken to reviewing the appointment of external examiners across the University in order to ensure independence and to avoid reciprocity (Southampton Solent University, paragraph 90)
- the provision of case-studies for the training of external examiners (University of Portsmouth, paragraph 52)

The use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

- the full engagement with the Academic Infrastructure (University of Chichester, paragraph 67)
- the steps the University has taken to improve its overview of interaction with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies at programme, school and faculty level (University of Salford, paragraph 38)
- the rigorous approach taken by the University to maintain an institutional overview of its professional body engagements (De Montfort University, paragraph 64)
- the systematic visits by academic and professional staff to other higher education institutions to benchmark University practice (Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 74)
- the strengthening of the College's quality assurance processes through the rigorous operation of the external examiner system and the involvement of independent external participants at institutional and course-level committees (Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 66)
- the regular review and updating of University policies with consistent use of gap analysis (University of Portsmouth, paragraphs 16, 58, 80)

Policy, regulations and practice relating to the assessment of students

- the development of a method of assessing musical performance which pays close attention to the maintenance of academic standards (Royal College of Music, paragraph 56)
- the School's academically rigorous management of the assessment of those of its students who take the foreign language programme offered as part of its collaborative provision arrangements (London Business School, paragraph 108)
- the clarity of definition and consistency of application of the procedure for the online submission of coursework which secures parity of treatment for students (University of Essex, paragraph 41)
- the approach to and the consistent implementation of the policy on plagiarism, which provides clear guidance to students and promotes sound academic practice (University of Essex, paragraph 42)
- the University's prompt and effective response to national external initiatives and to matters raised internally through both informal and formal channels (University of Sheffield, paragraphs 43 and 53 to 56)
- the structure and operation of the annual examination review meeting, involving academic, administrative and support staff, as a means of reflecting on assessment practice and of disseminating good practice across the institution (Aston University, paragraph 52)
- the development at departmental level of detailed discipline-related assessment criteria, based on the College's generic criteria (Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 38)
- the College's initiatives to support innovative practice in student assessment (Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 81)
- the considered steps being taken to focus on assessment for learning across the University (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 50, 99)
- the work being undertaken by the University to guard against plagiarism (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 51)
- the clarity and comprehensiveness of assessment criteria (Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 28)

- the University's initiatives to improve student progression and achievement (Middlesex University, paragraphs 37 and 64)
- the comprehensive analysis of data contained in the annual report on assessment (Middlesex University, paragraph 38)
- the University's systematic approach to plagiarism and the work of the school plagiarism officers, which together provide comprehensive institutional regulations and guidance (University of East Anglia, paragraph 43)

The use made of management information

- the development of a bespoke student record and management system (tRACker) which is being used proactively to address issues of student progression and retention (Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 46)
- the developing use of the balanced scorecard method to align central plans with school plans and with performance management (University of Bradford, paragraph 178)
- the use of risk alerts to provide an independent check on programme performance and enhance the effectiveness of annual programme monitoring (University of Exeter, paragraph 79)
- the increasing range of student-related data and statistical analyses produced by the Academic Quality Standards Unit that are available to the University, faculties and schools to assist in their monitoring, review and planning processes (University of Salford, paragraph 44)
- the way in which the University monitors and analyses the management information statistics on the achievement of minority ethnic students and implements an action plan to address the findings (Aston University, paragraph 58)
- the innovative use of educational balance sheets to assist the University's educational planning and as an aid to communication with members of the University Council (City University London, paragraph 47)
- the interrogation and analysis of the dataset of management information at programme and institutional level (Rose Bruford College, paragraph 97)
- the use of the SAMIS student record system to provide consistent data for a range of academic processes, such as undergraduate monitoring reports and the monitoring of research student progression (University of Bath, paragraphs 36, 85 and 89)
- the Student Performance Monitoring Group, which analyses the information provided to better inform the processes for monitoring retention and achievement (University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 47)
- the University's approach to facilitating staff engagement in quality assurance and quality enhancement through the extensive use of its information management system (University of Kent, paragraphs 28, 39)
- further developments in the scope and utility of the University's Progression Analysis Tool (University of Kent, paragraph 50)
- the regular predictive analysis of data to support student retention (University of Sunderland, paragraph 44)
- The comprehensive information, including academic statistics, available to staff and students on Insite, the University's intranet (University of Warwick, paragraph 194)

Appendix B: Recommendations relating to managing academic standards

Institutional framework for the management of standards

- review, develop and enhance its quality assurance procedures and consider the merit of publishing them in a single, comprehensive, readily accessible source (Royal College of Art, paragraphs 44, 46, 48, 85, 86, 98, 194, 249)
- reconsider the remit and operation of the Board of Professors to ensure that the Board is discharging its responsibilities for the management of quality and standards (Royal College of Music, paragraphs 23, 40, 44)
- as a matter of priority, establish a systematic approach to ensure that the School responds to the findings of internal and external reviews in a timely and effective way (School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraphs 22, 23)
- in order to guarantee the overall coherence of the academic committee structure, including the location of the strategic and operational responsibility for the management of quality and standards: review the terms of reference of the Academic Board, and complete the review of the functions and membership of the Academic Standards Committee and of its relationships to the Academic Board, the Undergraduate Studies Management Group, the Taught Postgraduate Studies Committee, the Higher Degrees Committee and the newly established Education Directorate, so as to ensure that it can fulfil its central role in quality assurance and enhancement (School of Pharmacy, paragraphs 31, 40, 42, 93)
- expedite progress with the new quality assurance manual to meet the planned implementation date, ensuring that the Academic Infrastructure is embedded within it and that its contents and purpose are communicated to all staff (School of Pharmacy, paragraphs 44, 45, 66, 69)
- continue to develop the style in which the meetings of its main committees are minuted to better convey the richness of the developments taking place (University College Falmouth, paragraphs 10, 68, 89)
- continue to reflect on the fitness for purpose of its policies, processes and procedures in relation to institutional management of academic standards and quality of learning opportunities as the institution expands in size and scope (University College Falmouth, paragraph 17)
- to affirm the institutional leadership of both quality assurance and enhancement activities and the roles of those supporting them, to ensure clarity and vision and to overcome the current institutional shortcomings in swiftly expediting change (Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraphs 10, 15, 25, 91)
- to review the operation of delegation within its committee structure, to ensure that all committees operate within their terms of reference, decisions are appropriately recorded, and that the academic board can exercise its full responsibilities for the security of academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities (Institute of Cancer Research, paragraphs 10, 24, 35, 136)
- to keep under review recent changes to the terms of reference and operation of the College's committees, in order to assure itself that the new arrangements meet its aspiration to ensure timely implementation of action plans and achievement of targets (Leeds College of Music, paragraphs 20, 21, 23, 29)
- streamlining the responsibilities and reporting lines of the formal committees and working groups with oversight of academic standards and quality, to ensure they each play a necessary, specific and unambiguous role (Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 25)
- to review the current committee processes, so as to ensure that the Academic Board can effectively discharge its institutional responsibility for the overview of

- quality and standards (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraphs 21, 31, 109)
- in order both to clarify and to ensure the continuing appropriateness of its current deliberative structure, further to review the respective roles of, and relationship between, its Senate and the Academic Advisory Council (University of Buckingham, paragraph 24)
- to develop a strategic approach to the assurance of academic standards and the management and enhancement of student learning opportunities (University of Buckingham, paragraphs 26, 31)
- in the light of current norms and practices elsewhere within the higher education sector, to reflect further upon the fitness for purpose of its existing practices in the following areas: the systematic engagement of committees and staff with the Academic Infrastructure (paragraphs 33 and 63), the provision of overview reports (paragraph 43), updating collaborative provision agreements (paragraph 102), the institutional use of statistical data (paragraph 111) and the independence of the complaints procedure for research students (paragraph 113) (University of Buckingham)
- to ensure that the University's transcripts or award certificates indicate the location of study in respect of collaborative partners (University of Chichester, paragraph 152)
- improve its ability to use key themes extracted from reports and reviews, and use them in order to enhance practice across the institution (University of Leeds, paragraphs 23, 42, 192)
- to consider producing supplementary operational guidance for the key quality assurance processes to support the consistent implementation of the Quality Assurance Manual (University of Lincoln, paragraphs 48, 57, 85, 105, 108)
- in developing its new Senate committee structure in the Realising our Vision project, the University is strongly advised to retain its robust arrangements for the management of academic quality, including the current high level of professional support (University of Salford, paragraph 24)
- to review whether the powers delegated to, and exercised by, Associate Deans (Education) are accompanied by suitable checks and balances (University of Southampton, paragraph 21)
- to ensure that the impact of the development of its programme frameworks does not detract from its current ability to maintain appropriate oversight of the standards of awards and the quality of the student experience in individual programmes (Bournemouth University, paragraphs 15, 31, 97)
- the University to clarify the delegation of authority between Academic Board and its subcommittees, and strengthen the accountability and reporting arrangements (Coventry University, paragraph 22)
- to complete the development and implementation of the new framework for the management of standards and quality in collaborative provision (Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 117)
- that its arrangements for the management of quality and standards in collaborative provision are better integrated with standard institutional mechanisms (Lancaster University, paragraph 85)
- ensure appropriate oversight so that the academic regulations and associated procedures are implemented consistently and accountably throughout the University (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 17, 22, 114)
- review and revise the academic regulations and associated procedures so as to ensure that they are clear, unambiguous and accessible to staff and students (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 19, 21, 23, 38, 49, 50, 51, 109, 112)
- consider reviewing the structures and processes in place at institutional level for the oversight of all the University's mechanisms for the assurance of quality and

- standards to ensure that they are appropriate and effective (Liverpool Hope University, paragraphs 26, 69, 73, 91, 150)
- that it urgently sets a clear timetable for ensuring that all collaborative provision has an appropriate legal agreement in place in order to safeguard the students' interests (Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 161)
 - ensure that the Institute's accreditation status with Liverpool John Moores University (as the degree awarding body) is subject to a written, legally-binding and regularly reviewed contractual agreement signed by the two institutions (Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 11)
 - develop further the management and organisation of its formal boards and committees, and the exchange of information between them, to ensure each is discharging its responsibilities for the management of quality and standards effectively and transparently (Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraphs 18, 19, 20, 22, 36, 59, 91, 101, 113)
 - consider establishing a formal reporting and accountability relationship between each school's senior academic committee or committees and the relevant committee(s) of Academic Council, and make committee minutes and papers readily accessible to staff and students (Queens University Belfast, paragraph 36)
 - to specify the limits of acceptable variability in practice at school level, with particular reference to nomenclature for key committees and to roles and responsibilities for the provision and accuracy of information for students, including the content of handbooks (University of East Anglia, paragraphs 16, 40, 164)
 - use the opportunity presented by institutional restructuring to simplify its quality assurance processes (University of Leicester, paragraph 7)
 - review arrangements for the double LLB/Maîtrise in English and French Law to ensure that it engages fully with the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* (University of Leicester, paragraph 80)
 - keep under review the committee structure for academic governance, to establish clarity in the designation of roles and responsibilities (University of Northampton, paragraph 17)
 - consider how the University may be assured that central policy and procedural requirements are observed in, and across, schools (University of Northampton, paragraph 17)
 - as a matter of priority, ensure that the University establishes a robust central system for the compilation and maintenance of a reliable, accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date register of all of its collaborative provision (University of Northampton, paragraph 85)
 - complete the task of codifying the regulations, responsibilities, protocols and roles relating to collaborative provision (University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraphs 117 and 118)

Internal programme and course approval, monitoring and review processes

- review the arrangements for course review, periodic review and course revalidation to eliminate duplication and to establish clarity of purpose for each process (Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 73)
- to reconsider the role of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee to ensure that all validation decisions are fully informed and have appropriate externality (Royal Agricultural College, paragraphs 13, 31)

Outcomes from Institutional audit: 2007-09

- to ensure all awards presented for validation adhere to the approved College validation process and reflect good practice in the sector (Royal Agricultural College, paragraphs 29, 30)
- revise its criteria for external appointments to periodic review panels to ensure that chairs have not recently been external examiners for the College's provision (Royal College of Music, paragraph 36)
- review the operations of the subcommittees of the Board of Professors with a view to ensuring they each play a specific and unambiguous role in supporting the Board to discharge its responsibilities (Royal College of Music, paragraphs 47, 79)
- in the context of programme approval, develop guidelines for programme design, criteria for appointment of external subject specialists, and advice for such specialists on the nature of their roles (School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraphs 17 to 20)
- develop a consistent and effective procedure for ensuring that the Annual Programme Review meets the requirements of its Quality Assurance Framework (School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraphs 82 to 90, 92)
- ensure adherence to programme validation procedures, and develop criteria for establishing the independence of external panel members (School of Pharmacy, paragraph 68)
- introduce a system of periodic review for all taught provision which will enable the School to take a strategic view of its present and future curricula (School of Pharmacy, paragraph 88)
- through its review of student feedback, ensure greater consistency in the use of both quantitative and qualitative feedback in its Annual Strategic Review reports, and give careful consideration to the explicit inclusion of written student feedback (University College Falmouth, paragraphs 30, 55, 72, 73)
- to review and update the procedures by which taught provision is validated and periodically reviewed (Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 31)
- to communicate and implement a formal and comprehensive routine programme monitoring process (Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 33)
- to consider the development of internal periodic review in order to promote greater College ownership of programme development (Leeds College of Music, paragraphs 36, 78)
- ensure it has in place a full and formal process for the routine monitoring of programmes over time, including overseeing the cumulative impact of incremental changes to curricula (London Business School, paragraph 36)
- reflect on the processes of programme approval, monitoring and review with a view to ensuring that the opportunities for enhancement afforded by external involvement are capitalised upon; and the outcomes of the processes are fully reported so that good practice is effectively captured and quality enhancement supported (Loughborough University, paragraphs 44, 52, 88, 90, 91, 94, 119, 134)
- encourage schools to draw upon appropriate external academic contributions during programme development as an opportunity for enhancement as well as a means of strengthening the quality assurance of programme proposals (Roehampton University, paragraph 52)
- reviewing the Academy's internal procedures for the guarantee of academic standards to ensure they are fit for purpose and are properly observed (Royal Academy of Music, paragraphs 27, 31, 35)
- to progress rapidly towards a more consolidated and harmonised institution wide quality management structure (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 51)
- develop a robust process for managing the discontinuation of courses.
The institution might find the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design,*

- approval, monitoring and review*, published by QAA, a point of reference in this respect (University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 33)
- to specify clear minimum requirements for schools' management of academic quality and standards and reinforce the use of formal reporting systems to demonstrate fulfilment of these requirements (University of Bradford, paragraphs 40, 96, 99, 102, 109)
 - to review the use of participants external to the University in programme approval and review, particularly to ensure that at least one appropriate academic external is present at each event (University of Bradford, paragraph 50)
 - to ensure that its arrangements for programme approval reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* (University of Buckingham, paragraphs 35, 66)
 - to review the role of the external adviser in the programme approval process to ensure that there is appropriate impartial and critical scrutiny, including with respect to resources for learning (University of Chichester, paragraphs 34 and 106)
 - to ensure that periodic review takes place every five years in line with the University's requirements (University of Chichester, paragraph 52)
 - to review the approval and periodic review processes for programmes that involve significant amounts of flexible and/or distributed learning to ensure appropriate specialist scrutiny (University of Chichester, paragraph 104)
 - to review its approach to recording that conditions of approval and review have been met, to ensure that no programme operates when not in full approval (University of Essex, paragraph 55)
 - to review the reporting mechanisms of validation to reduce the current variability in the coverage and detail provided (University of Lincoln, paragraphs 94, 168)
 - be more thorough in ensuring that annual monitoring reports are received, cover the intended areas, and are given full scrutiny at the appropriate level, ensuring in particular that the University Board for Teaching and Learning has sufficient time to consider in detail the reports from faculties (University of Reading, paragraph 44)
 - to ensure that the process for the approval of joint awards includes the production of a clear specification of the procedures and regulatory provisions to be applied to delivery of the programmes of study (University of Sheffield, paragraph 142)
 - the University reviews both its regulatory framework and, in particular, its procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review, and also its assessment regime, to ensure that these take due account of new developments in curricula and delivery methods (Aston University, paragraph 93)
 - the University immediately ensures that its procedures for the approval of programmes under collaborative provision are rigorously implemented so that it can be confident that, before students are admitted to a programme, all conditions of approval have been satisfied and signed off and, for Foundation Degrees, appropriate progression routes have been identified and are available (Aston University, paragraph 136)
 - to strengthen the management of the annual programme review process so as to achieve full and timely compliance with the College's agreed procedures (Goldsmiths' College, University of London, paragraphs 46, 112)
 - require an element of formal external academic input to programme approval (Lancaster University, paragraph 25)
 - review the designation of responsibility for the approval, modification and review of programmes and for the management of research student awards to secure more effective University oversight of quality management (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 24, 26, 33, 110, 112)
 - revise its procedures for the approval and amendment of courses and schemes to ensure that the integrity of awards is always safeguarded (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 25)

Outcomes from Institutional audit: 2007-09

- continue the work of the University to ensure that the annual review process provides a rigorous consideration of and reporting on all courses, in line with the expectations of the *Code of practice* (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 30, 37)
- ensure that the recommendation made in the previous audit report, that periodic review be undertaken at regular intervals and that there should be a contribution from external peers that is always critical and robust, is addressed fully; and ensure that the overriding responsibility for the procedure, nature and timing of the periodic review process is determined by Academic Board or an appropriate subcommittee (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 33, 35)
- ensure the robust and consistent use of appropriate data in the periodic review process and consider whether this process should routinely involve engagement with students (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 34, 63)
- review the effectiveness of the various internal audit processes and how they work together to ensure that their outcomes contribute in an integrated way to the management of academic standards, quality and enhancement (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 36, 39)
- develop clear procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of joint awards (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 37)
- develop systems and procedures for course approval and periodic review so that the University can assure itself of consistent engagement with the elements of the Academic Infrastructure across the full range of provision (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 47)
- revise its module descriptor forms to make clear the relationship between module and programme learning outcomes (Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 17)
- that it develops a process, with the least possible delay, whereby courses are unable to commence without a valid legal agreement in place (Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 161)
- keep under review the annual monitoring process to ensure that the deliberative structure meets the Institute's aspirations for overall consistency of reporting, the implementation of action plans and the achievement of targets (Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraphs 59, 73, 75, 77, 84, 87)
- the academic review process gives explicit consideration to statistical data (Middlesex University, paragraph 23)
- remain mindful of the recommendation of the previous Institutional audit with respect to programme oversight, as it assesses the comprehensiveness and fitness for purpose of its new periodic School review process (Nottingham Trent University, paragraphs 69, 70)
- consider whether the Annual Programme Review process provides the Education Committee and the Collaborative Provision Group with sufficient evidence of appropriate quality and reliability from schools and collaborative partners, to enable them to discharge their responsibilities on behalf of Academic Council (Queens University Belfast, paragraphs 41, 178)
- ensure that the implementation of the College's mechanisms for establishing, securing and maintaining the standards of awards becomes demonstrably equivalent for all taught programmes and that the recorded evidence relating to standards set, their monitoring, review and attainment is made more consistent and explicit (Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 40)
- review its programme monitoring and review processes, to ensure that the effectiveness of their operation, including appropriate actions, is evaluated at institutional level (Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 103)
- clarify further the respective functions of Academic Board, the Teaching Quality Committee and Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee with regard to the strategic oversight of its arrangements for assuring the standard of awards and

enhancing learning opportunities, and that it ensures that members of these committees understand clearly their roles and responsibilities (Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 104)

- review and revise the procedures for programme approval with particular reference to the determination of the form of approval to be undertaken and the nomination and approval of internal and external panel members (Southampton Solent University, paragraph 54)
- revise its procedure for monitoring the cumulative effects of programme, course and unit modifications to ensure a consistent approach to determining the need for programme re-approval (Southampton Solent University, paragraph 61)
- ensure sufficient externality in panel membership for periodic review (the Degree Scheme Review), in particular a chair independent of the host faculty and an academic or other external member familiar with UK academic standards in relation to the programme (University of Bath, paragraph 46)
- to ensure that the intended learning outcomes of a programme are explicitly reflected in the intended learning outcomes of its constituent units and that unit specifications always clearly express the means whereby each of the unit's intended learning outcomes is to be assessed (University of Bristol, paragraph 28)
- review the Academic Quality Assurance manual, Part 1, Appendix 6, section 3, in order to ensure scrutiny of each level of annual monitoring by more than one person within faculty quality frameworks (University of Central Lancashire, paragraphs 77 and 78)
- to reflect further on the ways in which central oversight of school-based periodic review is maintained and consider in particular whether provision for light touch reviews, and the relationship between professional, statutory and regulatory body reviews and internal reviews, should be more closely defined (University of Greenwich, paragraph 41)
- to revise the process by which short courses that contribute to University awards are developed and approved, to include input external to the University, in order to ensure the appropriateness of level, content, learning outcomes and assessment (University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 23)
- monitor the operation and reporting of periodic subject review, to confirm that the University's requirements for separation of the process from those for course approval and for minor modifications to programmes are met (University of Northampton, paragraph 33)
- conduct an early review of the way in which annual and periodic subject review of collaborative provision are specified and implemented to ensure that the operation of all of the University's individual collaborative arrangements is appraised in a rigorous and timely fashion (University of Northampton, paragraphs 89 and 91-93)
- review criteria for the appointment of external advisers in programme approval and review (University of Sunderland, paragraphs 19, 21, 26)
- articulate more clearly the role of faculties in the management of quality and standards (University of Surrey, paragraphs 34, 52, 57)
- reconsider its timetable for Internal Academic Review, prioritising those areas which have fallen outside the University's stated timeframe (University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 40)

The contribution made by external examiners

- the use made of external examiners, in particular the lack of external examiner input at the College Examination Committee (Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 24)
- to develop a formal mechanism, to ensure that full consideration is given to external examiners' reports; the outcomes of the consideration, including action taken is

- recorded; and that external examiners are provided with a formal considered response to their comments and recommendations and the actions taken (Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 43)
- give further consideration to the involvement of external examiners in the assessment process for elective courses (London Business School, paragraph 46)
- formalise and document its management and consideration of, and response to, external examiners' reports (London Business School, paragraph 52)
- identifying a reliable means of ensuring that action resulting from the Academy's quality assurance procedures is carried out in a timely and effective manner (Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 42)
- to ensure that its policy of external examiner membership of assessment committees is fully implemented, and that external examiners are fully involved in the business of both assessment committees and boards of examiners; and ensure that all external examiners are made aware of the revised report pro forma, which addresses comparability of academic standards (University of Bradford, paragraphs 59, 63)
- to review its arrangements for appointing, briefing and inducting external examiners (University of Buckingham, paragraph 40)
- to introduce a template for external examiners' reports (University of Cambridge, paragraph 32)
- to strengthen the College's arrangements for the timely appointment, and the briefing and support, of its external examiners (Goldsmiths' College, paragraphs 26, 110)
- to review the proposed arrangements for external examiner involvement in decisions on awards for joint honours programmes, so as to ensure appropriate externality (Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 33)
- to develop a more formalised and systematic way of making external examiner reports accessible to student representatives on a programme (Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 154)
- that external examiners for all overseas collaborations are competent to make independent and robust comparisons with United Kingdom (UK) national standards (Lancaster University, paragraph 88)
- ensure that external examiners' reports are shared with students in accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, Phase two outcomes*, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45) (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 42, 130)
- ensure that external examiners' reports are shared with student representatives as a matter of course, in accordance with HEFCE 06/45 (Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraphs 12, 40, 86)
- take steps to share external examiner reports more widely with students (Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 50)
- implement, in collaboration with the University, revised procedures in the Institute that will enhance the role of external examiners in securing the standards of awards (Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraphs 29, 35, 38)
- all external examiners' reports are discussed by programme boards of study, including student representatives (Middlesex University paragraph 26)
- to enable student representatives to see external examiners' reports in full (Open University, paragraph 57)
- revise the procedure for amending examination board decisions following the Chair's action in light of appeals, to ensure the timely and full involvement of external examiners (Southampton Solent University, paragraph 120)
- to clarify the roles of individuals and deliberative committees in the approval and appointment of external examiners and the operation of the external examiner system (University of Greenwich, paragraph 43)

- implement consistently the requirements in its Code of Practice that external examiner reports, and departmental responses to external examiner reports, are shared with students through staff-student committees (University of Hull, paragraph 160)
- revise the external examiner report form with prompts for more detailed comment, in particular about learning opportunities, in order to strengthen the enhancement value of these reports (University of Portsmouth, paragraph 54)
- to provide student representatives with copies of external examiner reports in accordance with the HEFCE publication, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, Phase two outcomes*, October 2006/45 (University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 25)

The use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

- develop a mechanism by which the College can assure itself that it has a systematic, ongoing, timely and effective engagement with all elements of the Academic Infrastructure (Royal College of Art, paragraph 62)
- to review its engagement with the Code of practice and other external reference points (Institute of Cancer Research, paragraphs 13, 31, 43, 45, 47, 48, 54, 105)
- ensure that it develops and implements procedures for the systematic deliberative oversight of the quality and standards of its educational provision as a whole, with particular reference to the nature and level of its engagement with external reference points (London Business School, paragraph 70)
- develop robust processes for ensuring that professional body requirements and reports are considered fully at appropriate points in the approval, monitoring, and review of courses (University College for the Creative Arts, paragraphs 49 and 50)
- to ensure the standards set for its taught postgraduate programmes are consistent with national expectations by systematically reviewing them against the appropriate level descriptor in the FHEQ (University of Buckingham, paragraph 48)
- it implements, without undue delay, the recommendation of the General Board's Education Committee that the award of BA with Honours should necessarily involve the successful completion of Part II of the Tripos (University of Cambridge, paragraph 43)
- ensure that learning outcomes contained in programme specifications are, as the University expects, specific to each programme (University of Leeds, paragraphs 47, 50)
- consider its methods for ensuring that it has a clear, comprehensive overview of the current status of practice with regard to changes in the Academic Infrastructure (University of Leeds, paragraphs 76, 79)
- to fulfil the commitment outlined in the Quality Assurance Manual that programme specifications be made available 'as a source of information for students and prospective students seeking an understanding of a programme' at the earliest opportunity and reflect on the effectiveness of the process by which programme specifications are kept current (University of Lincoln, paragraphs 41, 42)
- engage with the *Code of practice* in a systematic way at institutional level to develop further its policies and procedures for the assurance of academic quality and standards (Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraphs 60, 62)
- consider how to make the process for responding to changes in external reference points more systematic (Nottingham Trent University, paragraphs 41, 45)
- ensure that its arrangements for engaging with external reference points relating to standards are applied consistently across the College and are clearly articulated in its quality assurance processes (Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 94)

- to further to the advice provided in the QAA Institutional audit report of 2004, give priority to the systematic calibration of the University's provision, against the guidance provided by the FHEQ on the matter of levels (University of East Anglia, paragraph 22)
- in order to eliminate ambiguity about the nature and standing of its taught undergraduate awards, to review the nomenclature and status of those awards that fall outside the scope of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) but nonetheless uses its terminology (University of Greenwich, paragraph 53)
- to implement mechanisms to maintain institutional oversight of the cumulative effect of minor changes and derogations on programmes (University of Greenwich, paragraph 56)
- to revise its plans for making awards based on credit-bearing short courses and/or the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) so that appropriate attention is paid to external reference points, including subject benchmark statements, in determining the name of such awards, and, in doing so, to review APEL protocols in support of the process (University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 35)
- to review its policy and procedures to ensure that the University exercises adequate control over the issuing of transcripts to students on validated provision, and ensure that the procedures are acted upon in a consistent and transparent manner (University of Winchester, paragraph 38)
- to work towards routinely providing student transcripts that meet the requirements of the European Diploma Supplement (University of Winchester, paragraph 39)

Policy, regulations and practice relating to the assessment of students

- review the requirements for quoracy for internal progression boards and ensure that they are observed for all meetings of the boards (Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 55)
- ensure that at the earliest opportunity all remaining programme specifications are completed, and suitably comprehensive learning outcomes produced and published for all courses in the context of both undergraduate and taught master's programmes (School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraphs 69 to 71)
- update the School's learning and teaching strategy and incorporate an assessment strategy (School of Pharmacy, paragraphs 48, 80)
- articulate the institution's strategy for the operation and development of assessment practice (Bath Spa University, paragraph 50)
- to ensure clear minimum expectations in the communication of assessment activities and criteria, to minimise the current variability and inconsistencies within and across courses, levels and their supporting documentation (Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraphs 29, 42, 46, 47, 50, 57, 142)
- to review and update procedures for extenuating circumstances submitted by students to examination boards, to ensure appropriate student confidentiality and equity of treatment (Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 51)
- to ensure appropriate attendance by internal examiners at examination boards, to enable a full and comprehensive discussion of the modules under consideration (Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 53)
- to develop an assessment policy that clearly specifies assessment principles, procedures and processes and disseminate this to staff, students and external examiners (Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 54)

- to develop and express more clearly the links between intended learning outcomes, generic grading criteria and assignment marking criteria (Leeds College of Music, paragraphs 50, 54, 55)
- to develop its framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, to enable the College to meet fully the requirements of the Open University's Handbook for Validated Awards (Leeds College of Music, paragraphs 53, 58, 59, 65)
- to develop the management of assessment marks (Leeds College of Music, paragraph 57)
- to develop a set of comprehensive assessment regulations clarifying the arrangements for the classification of Open University validated awards, progression from these awards, the consideration of borderline cases, and the application of compensation; and communicate these arrangements consistently to staff, external examiners and students (Leeds College of Music, paragraphs 59, 62, 65, 66, 144, 145)
- devise and implement a means of ensuring independent oversight of all credit derived from summative assessment within collaborative provision which contributes to an award (London Business School, paragraph 104)
- develop an assessment strategy that deals with issues of validity, reliability and consistency in order to underpin the comparability of standards across awards (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraph 34)
- review the management of assessment, progression and degree classification procedures to ensure that they test that programme learning outcomes are met and that equitable treatment of students across the institution is assured (Loughborough University, paragraphs 57, 64)
- monitor local assessment guidelines with a view to ensuring a consistent interpretation of academic regulations, equity of treatment for students and equivalence of approach to the management of assessment university wide (Roehampton University, paragraph 32)
- ensure that mechanisms are in place to deal promptly with cases where students' module choices represent insufficient credit to satisfy the award or progression requirements of their programmes (Roehampton University, paragraph 35)
- to put in place appropriate mechanisms and oversight to ensure internal comparability of academic standards (University of Bradford, paragraph 80)
- to keep under review the balance between central policy and local flexibility with respect to assessment and feedback to students, so as to ensure that a consistent approach is maintained for students in all areas of provision (University of Brighton, paragraphs 38, 77 and 90)
- to consider the introduction of a University-wide approach to penalties for late-submitted assessed work (University of Cambridge, paragraph 57)
- review the application of the University's marking and assessment strategies with a view to ensuring comparability of practice across all schools (University of Exeter, paragraph 72)
- check Codes in order to ensure compliance with its expectations, where, through school Codes of Practice and in order to reflect disciplinary differences, it permits variation in practice in assessment (University of Leeds, paragraphs 57, 58)
- where university-level policy or procedural guidance is issued to schools, to make more explicit the degree of observance expected, so that it is clear whether local variation is appropriate (University of Southampton, paragraphs 43, 87 and 96)
- to monitor closely the consistency of programme handbooks with the guidance to be developed by a University working group, and with particular emphasis on the clarity of information concerning assessment policies and regulations (University of Southampton, paragraph 135)

Outcomes from Institutional audit: 2007-09

- implement all elements of its Assessment Policy to enable it to meet its stated strategic objective of working towards the comparability of the student experience in assessment across its constituent colleges (University of the Arts London, paragraph 54)
- ensure that feedback to students on their assessed work is consistently timely and effective in supporting learning (City University London, paragraph 57)
- to explore further the opportunities for greater consistency of operation and more effective use of supporting information in the work of examination boards (Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 34)
- facilitate student access to the rules on progression and classification of awards (Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraphs 29, 85)
- move expeditiously towards a decision on the anonymous-marking of coursework (Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 30)
- undertake with the University (as the degree awarding body) a review of the Institute's degree classification profile across its undergraduate programmes with due regard to national comparators across the sector (Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraphs 53, 55)
- consistently apply the policies and guidance provided in the Academic Quality and Standards Handbook with respect to feedback to students on assessment (Nottingham Trent University, paragraphs 50 to 52)
- address the variability in education practices at school level, to ensure equity of treatment of all students and of the student experience (Queens University Belfast, paragraphs 81, 111, 122, 211)
- ensure that where inconsistencies at course level in regulatory and other areas are identified, clear institutional action is taken to ensure they are resolved (Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 76)
- review and revise its assessment procedures to ensure greater consistency in the accuracy of recording and reporting of marks (Southampton Solent University, paragraph 120)
- revise the information on extenuating circumstances provided to students to ensure that it accurately and consistently reflects the implementation of the policy (Southampton Solent University, paragraph 286)
- in the light of previous progress on harmonisation, and in order to consolidate further the equivalence of the student learning experience, UCL should maintain its momentum towards achieving the institutional coherence on regulatory and academic processes identified by its own committees (University College London, paragraphs 84, 98, 203)
- where an institutional position has been reached on the harmonisation and simplification of regulatory and academic processes, UCL should seek to achieve full and timely departmental engagement and alignment (University College London, paragraphs 84, 99, 163, 174, 206)
- keep under review the extent to which the implementation and operation of the range of new policy initiatives (such as the assessment framework, personal tutoring, peer observation and staff appraisal) are producing the intended outcomes in terms of the management of academic standards and quality (University of Bath, paragraphs 58, 83, 131, 139, 141)
- ensure consistency of procedures for annual review and for granting extensions to coursework deadlines (University of Birmingham, paragraphs 41, 45, 60, 62)
- develop a more closely defined and transparent mechanism for establishing the boundaries within which the moderation of marks should occur to ensure greater consistency across the University (University of Birmingham, paragraph 57)
- that unit specifications, in detailing assessment criteria, consistently include, where applicable, an explanation of how the award of credit may be affected by criteria

- additional to marks in an examination or other formal assessment (University of Bristol, paragraphs 28, 57)
- to move expeditiously towards its stated ideal of a University-wide method for degree classification (University of Bristol, paragraph 51)
 - investigate the exercise of discretion by Boards of Examiners in 2008-09, including the effectiveness of the training provided, making it the subject of a report by the University Chief Examiner, as soon as possible, following the current assessment round (University of Durham, paragraph 56)
 - to assure itself that the application in practice of policy and procedures for extensions to submission deadlines, and for extenuating circumstances, does not result in inequitable treatment of students (University of East Anglia, paragraph 42)
 - to revise the guidance for the conduct of assessment boards, to establish and secure University-wide specifications for minimum attendance and quoracy (University of East Anglia, paragraph 46)
 - ensure that, in reaching assessment board decisions, the regulatory framework is applied consistently, and judgements do not undermine the University's assurance of the standards of its taught undergraduate awards (University of Greenwich, paragraph 68)
 - to develop further, implement and publish protocols for ensuring that the academic standards of programmes delivered and assessed in languages other than English are equivalent to those delivered and assessed in English; in particular, and in the light of its risk-based approach to the oversight of modules delivered by partner institutions, to introduce and publish protocols for the moderation by University staff of modules judged to be of medium or high risk (University of Hertfordshire, paragraphs 40 to 42)
 - to revise the generic grading criteria so that the grades align with those in the University's grading and marking scale, to further develop these grading criteria to differentiate between all levels and to ensure their consistent use and communication to students (University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 45)
 - review the assessment regulations for taught postgraduate programmes, to ensure that the required learning outcomes are met for all awards (University of Leicester, paragraph 30)
 - consider how assessed work can be returned in a timely fashion so that students can apply the feedback in subsequent assessment tasks (University of Northampton, paragraph 58)
 - that the University ensures that it has effective means to ensure oversight of equity of practice across colleges, especially where this affects student progression (University of Oxford, paragraph 62)
 - that the University should continue its work on identifying and addressing the gender gap in the examination performance of final-year students (University of Oxford, paragraph 141)
 - ensure that its policies for the management of the submission, security and return of student coursework are followed consistently (University of Portsmouth, paragraph 69)
 - improve the oversight of regulations pertaining to its awards (University of Sunderland, paragraphs 24, 39, 42)
 - encourage further consideration of how the University defines academic standards for its own awards, in order to engage the whole institution in articulating and applying clearly and consistently expectations of student achievement (University of Surrey, paragraphs 45, 80, 82, 89, 93, 94)
 - to review its management of joint honours courses, including the application of additional credit to such courses (University of Warwick, paragraphs 58, 78, 90, 116)

- to secure consistency in the provision of assessment criteria at module level in the interests of equity of treatment of students across the provision (University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 41)

The use made of management information

- make more consistent and purposeful use of management information for admissions, progression, completion and achievement at all levels (School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraphs 72 to 75)
- continue to provide training and development so that staff can make the most productive use of centrally provided data in quality assurance and enhancement (Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 70)
- ensure effective and consistent analysis of module evaluations and student data in annual subject reports (Bath Spa University, paragraph 74)
- to develop systems for the monitoring of admissions, retention, progression and completion data for taught provision, to inform internal monitoring and enhancement processes (Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 56)
- to develop mechanisms to ensure that it can draw and reflect upon qualitative and quantitative data from the institution and the wider sector in order to benchmark and to monitor institutional performance (Leeds College of Music, paragraph 72)
- continue to clarify the roles and purposes of the academic committees to ensure that they work together in an increasingly effective and complementary way (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraph 37)
- continue to develop the more systematic use of management information to support the achievement of both strategic and course-level goals (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraph 38)
- making more effective use of management information in monitoring and review procedures (Royal Academy of Music, paragraphs 49 and 50)
- regularly to use student-related data to inform the development and implementation of strategy and policy relating to the management of academic standards (University of Cambridge, paragraph 64)
- extend the development of appropriate data collection and analysis processes relating to postgraduate taught students in the context of plans to develop postgraduate taught provision (University of Salford, paragraph 42)
- to improve the provision of internally consistent progression and completion statistics for routine use by schools as an interim measure, until the planned central system for providing these statistics comes fully on-stream (University of Southampton, paragraph 46)
- to review the approach at institutional level to the use of the qualitative and quantitative management information collected from both internal and external sources with a view to establishing a holistic and methodical approach to the provision of student learning opportunities (University of Sussex, paragraphs 55, 63, 64, 76, 123)
- the University reflects on the records it needs to retain in order to manage its business effectively and, in particular, how its systems ensure that these are systematically stored and readily retrievable (Aston University paragraph 60)
- consistently to analyse and use management information to inform decision-making and action-planning in its institutional-level academic deliberative structures (City University London, paragraphs 51, 72)
- strengthen the systematic analysis of data in annual and periodic review (Lancaster University, paragraph 45)

- to consistently analyse in greater depth the extensive management information it gathers and use it systematically to inform qualitative strategic analysis, academic development and quality enhancement (Open University, paragraphs 77, 148)
- continue to prioritise and expedite the development of the integrated College-wide approach to the systematic collection, analysis, evaluation and use of management information at course and institutional level; and that, as part of this approach, the College moves rapidly towards a consistent and regulated approach to the identification, dating, attribution and registration of all relevant documents (Royal Veterinary College, paragraphs 86, 103, 108)
- review its collaborative provision procedures to clarify the evidence required from its collaborative partners, to give the College assurance that the standards and quality of the provision are fully met (Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 152)
- ensure that data on student performance disaggregated by module and partner College is used routinely and consistently by external examiners, boards of examiners and in annual and periodic review processes (University of Northampton, paragraphs 89 and 90)
- that the University should progress its plans for improvement of the student information system so that it can monitor and investigate causes for students who fail to progress (University of Oxford, paragraph 67)

Appendix C: Methodology used for producing papers in *Outcomes from Institutional audit*

The analysis of the Institutional audit reports which underlies the *Outcomes* papers is based on the headings set out in annexes B and C of the *Handbook for Institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland* (2006).

For each published Institutional audit report, the text is taken from the report and technical annex published on QAA's website and converted to plain text format. The resulting files are checked for accuracy and introduced into a qualitative research software package, QSR NVivo8[®]. The software provides a wide range of tools to support indexing and searching and allows features of interest to be coded for further investigation. The basic coding of the reports follows the template headings set out in the *Handbook*. Further specific analysis is based on the more detailed text of the technical annex.

An audit team's judgements, its identification of features of good practice, and its recommendations appear in the introduction to the technical annex, with cross references to the main text where 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 written by experienced institutional auditors and audit secretaries. To assist in compiling the papers, reports produced using QSR NVivo8[®] 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. The authors then consider this evidence in the context of the more detailed explanations given in the main text of the technical annex to establish themes for further discussion.

Appendix D: The Institutional audit reports

2006-07

Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication
 Royal Agricultural College
 Royal College of Art
 Royal College of Music
 School of Oriental and African Studies
 School of Pharmacy
 University College Falmouth

2007-08

Anglia Ruskin University
 Bath Spa University
 Central School of Speech and Drama
 Institute of Cancer Research
 Keele University
 Leeds College of Music
 London Business School
 London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
 Loughborough University
 Roehampton University
 Royal Academy of Music
 Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance
 University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester
 University of Bradford
 University of Brighton
 University of Buckingham
 University of Cambridge
 University of Chichester
 University of Essex
 University of Exeter
 University of Leeds
 University of Lincoln
 University of Reading
 University of Salford
 University of Sheffield
 University of Southampton
 University of Sussex
 University of the Arts London
 University of York

2008-09

Aston University
 Bournemouth University
 City University London
 Coventry University
 De Montfort University
 Goldsmiths' College
 Lancaster University
 Leeds Metropolitan University
 Leeds Trinity and All Saints³⁰¹
 Liverpool Hope University
 Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts
 Middlesex University
 Nottingham Trent University
 Open University
 Queen's University Belfast
 Rose Bruford College
 Royal Veterinary College
 Southampton Solent University
 University College London
 University of Bath
 University of Birmingham
 University of Bristol
 University of Central Lancashire
 University of Durham
 University of East Anglia
 University of Greenwich
 University of Hertfordshire
 University of Hull
 University of Kent
 University of Leicester
 University of Liverpool
 University of Northampton
 University of Oxford
 University of Portsmouth
 University of Sunderland
 University of Surrey
 University of the West of England, Bristol
 University of Warwick
 University of Winchester
 University of Wolverhampton

The full text of the Institutional audit reports is available from www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/Pages/Institutions-A-Z.aspx.

³⁰¹ Now Leeds Trinity University College.

Appendix E: Titles in *Outcomes from Institutional audit: 2007-09*

- *Managing academic standards*
- *Managing learning opportunities*
- *Student engagement and support*
- *External involvement in quality management*
- *Assessment and feedback*
- *Published information*

All published *Outcomes* papers can be found at
www.qaa.ac.uk/ImprovingHigherEducation/Pages/Outcomes.aspx.

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