QAA

Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09

Published information

Third series

Contents

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, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (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 Annex C).

Two series of papers, covering audits which took place between 2003 and 2006, have already appeared, together with two related series, *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 other evidence, for example from the National Student Survey, and of 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 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 those policy makers and managers within the higher education community with immediate responsibility for and interests 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.

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

Summary

This paper considers the accuracy and reliability of published information as reported in 76 Institutional Audit reports published between February 2007 and June 2009. The overall conclusion in most of the reports was that 'reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards'.

In general students, both in their written submissions and in meetings during the Institutional Audit process, were positive about their experiences of published information. This included information provided for applicants, and for students before they arrived and during their programmes. The students considered that the prospectuses and other promotional information institutions published was generally accurate and was reflected in their later experience. The area where concern was most often expressed was in relation to variability in the quality of handbooks for their academic study between different departments within the institution.

The audit reports indicate that some institutions had formal strategies, policies and guidelines for the production of published information. The processes employed to check the accuracy and reliability of published information were generally found to be effective.

Over the period covered by the audit reports analysed, the requirements placed on institutions by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) for publication of information changed, in particular with respect to external examiners' reports, moving from publication of summaries on the Teaching Quality Information website (later replaced by Unistats) to sharing the reports with students. Most institutions had engaged positively with the expectations, although there was considerable variation in whether students had access to external examiners' reports between institutions.

Programme specifications were reported to be produced by most institutions, although not all institutions were explicitly said to make them externally available. Most institutions were considered to have accurate programme specifications but in some cases they were not produced in a format that was student-friendly, being used primarily for quality assurance purposes.

Where collaborative provision was considered as part of the Institutional Audit process, institutions were generally found to have appropriate mechanisms in place for checking the accuracy of the information produced by their collaborative partners. However, the audit reports indicate that there was considerable variability in the availability and accuracy of registers of collaborative provision.

The new method of Institutional review from 2011 places greater emphasis on public information through the introduction of a formal judgement. The accuracy and reliability of published information will therefore become even more important in the future.

Context

1   This paper is based on a review of the outcomes of the 76 Institutional Audit reports published between September 2006 and July 2009 (a full list of the reports can be found at Appendix D on page 30). The methodology used in analysing the reports for this and other papers in the *Outcomes from Institutional Audit* series is described in Appendix C, page 29.

2   The formal requirement for higher education institutions to publish specified items of information has its origins in the report of the Task Group on Information on quality and standards in higher education to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 2002, known as the Cooke Report.[2] The Task Group was created in 2001 as one of three strands of the Quality Assurance Framework, the revised method for quality assurance in higher education in England.[3] It recognised that accurate and up-to-date information was important to enable stakeholders, in particular students, to make informed decisions, and to ensure proper accountability for the use of public funds. The final report made a series of recommendations on what information on quality and standards of learning and teaching should be available from all institutions, alongside a published subset of quantitative and qualitative data.

3   After consultation with the sector, HEFCE established a Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website and published final guidance on revised data requirements for institutions.[4] The TQI website went live in 2004. Quantitative information for the TQI website was provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and included data on entry qualifications and tariff points; student progression and completion rates; degree classifications; and first destinations of graduates. Institutions were also expected to publish certain qualitative information on the TQI website, including summaries of external examiners' findings; a summary of the institution's learning and teaching strategy; summary statements of the results of, and actions taken in response to, major internal reviews; and summaries of links with relevant employers.

4   The guidance confirmed the list of information defined in the Cooke Report that should be publicly available. This included information on the institutional context, student admission, progression and completion data, and information on the institution's internal procedures for assuring academic quality and standards. QAA restated its policy that programme specifications should be made publicly available and, from January 2005, included monitoring of information published on the TQI website in the audit process.

5   The National Student Survey (NSS) was introduced in 2005.[5] The NSS collects feedback from final year undergraduates on their perceptions of the quality of student experience. The results of the survey can aid prospective students in making informed choices about their future studies and contributes to public accountability. It is also used by institutions as a source of data for quality enhancement.

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[2] HEFCE 2002/15: *Information on quality and standards in higher education*. Final report of the Task Group, www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2002/02_15.htm.
[3] HEFCE 2001/45: *Quality assurance in higher education*. Proposals for consultation, www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2001/01_45.htm.
[4] HEFCE 2003/51: *Information on quality and standards in higher education*. Final guidance, www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2003/03_51.
[5] HEFCE 2004/33: *National Student Survey 2005*. Outcomes of the consultation and guidance on the next steps, www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2004/04_33.

6   In 2006 HEFCE published the outcomes of phase two of the Review of the Quality Assurance Framework (known as the Burslem Review).[6] The review found that the TQI website was not meeting the original objectives, nor providing a good return on the investment of resources. The review recommended changes to the information published by institutions and changes to the TQI website.

7   The original TQI website was replaced in the summer of 2007 by the Unistats website.[7] The quantitative data published on the website remained similar but was expanded to include NSS results. The requirement to publish summaries of external examiners' reports was replaced by the expectation that institutions should share the reports with student representatives. Further, the report included suggestions as to the kinds of information that should be made available by institutions either by publication or request. These included:

- contextual information, for example:
    - mission statement
    - sections of corporate plan
    - statement of quality assurance policies and processes
    - learning and teaching strategy

- information about the quality and standards of programmes, for example:
    - programme specifications
    - information about procedures and outcomes for programme approval, monitoring and review
    - details of accreditation from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies
    - arrangements for assessment and external examination procedures
    - results of internal student surveys

- information about links with employers.

Additionally the review recommended that the UCAS website should include certain additional information for applicants, including details about individual courses and institutions and guidance on making applications.

8   The accuracy and completeness of published information, including teaching quality information, continued to be monitored in Institutional Audit in the revised process which operated from 2006. Those institutions audited in 2006-7 worked to the requirements set out in HEFCE 2003/51. For the remainder of the period covered by this paper institutions submitted data to the Unistats website and followed the requirements in Annex F of HEFCE 2006/45. However, those institutions audited in the autumn term of the 2007-8 academic year were potentially in a transition period, producing their briefing papers before the launch of the Unistats website, and this is occasionally reflected in the audit report.

9   This paper focuses on the commentaries on published information in section 7 of the Institutional Audit reports. The *Handbook for Institutional Audit: England and Northern Ireland* (QAA 2006) states that:

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[6] HEFCE 2006/45: *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework*. Phase two outcomes, www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2006/06_45.
[7] HEFCE 19/2007: Access to the 2007 National Student Survey results and launch of the Unistats web-site, www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/circlets/2007/cl19_07.

'This section focuses on the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about its educational provision and the academic standards that it supports is accurate and complete. The institution's published teaching quality information (TQI) will feature in this section, with the audit team commenting on the basis of analysis by QAA's Information Unit and by its own sampling of TQI in the audit trails. The content of the section will also be informed by the students' written submission (if applicable) and by the team's discussions with students.'

'Published information' has also been interpreted as extending to publicity information such as prospectuses and web publicity.

10   This paper also refers to discussions of specific subsets of information found in other sections of the audit reports, particularly:

- partner institutions (section 5, Collaborative arrangements)
- information specifically for postgraduate research students (section 6)
- programme specifications and general information on academic quality and standards (section 2, Institutional management of academic standards and section 3, Institutional management of learning opportunities).

Themes

11   A consideration of the features of good practice, the recommendations and other references to published information in the audit reports suggests that the following broad themes merit further discussion:

- commentaries on published information
- information for students
  – students' experience of published and other information
  – prospectuses and pre-arrival information
  – information provided during the programme
- strategies, policies and processes for published information
  – processes for ensuring accuracy of published information
- information published on the TQI and Unistats websites
  – institutions audited in academic year 2006-07
  – institutions audited in academic years 2007-08 and 2008-09
  – sharing external examiners' reports
- programme specifications
- information relating to collaborative provision
  – register of collaborative provision
  – monitoring information published by partners.

Commentaries on published information

12   Most of the Institutional Audit reports concluded that information published by institutions was both accurate and reliable. The commentary in 45 of the 76 audit reports was that 'reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that [the institution] publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards,' without any qualification. A number of other commentaries contained minor variations of wording but conveying the same conclusion. Some reports concentrated on processes rather than the

output of information and, in all these cases, they concluded that the processes were effective and an effective basis for the provision of reliable and complete information.

13   Where audit reports recorded minor qualifications to a generally positive view, the most common area of concern was handbooks and other information for students.[8] Such information, which relates to academic and personal advice and guidance, is considered briefly below (paragraphs 23-26) and in more detail in *Outcomes from Institutional Audit 2007-09: Managing learning opportunities*.

14   In only three reports was there a more general proviso within the commentaries on published information. In two cases, the reports noted 'that, although there were areas to be addressed in the consistency and updating of some aspects of the School's published information, overall, the accuracy and completeness of such information was improving'.[9] Both the audits concerned took place in 2006-7 when there was uncertainty over policy on the provision of teaching quality information (see paragraph 8). One institution admitted it had not engaged with the TQI website and was awaiting the relaunch.[10] The other institution was, at the time of the audit, in the process of updating its website and reconfiguring its arrangements for publishing material.[11] In the third case, although overall reliance could be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information published by the institution, the commentary indicated that 'some aspects of version control and accuracy would benefit from management attention'.[12] This related primarily to publication of data on the Unistats website and inconsistencies in programme specifications on the University's website as a consequence of problems related to the recent introduction of a new data management system.

Information for students

15   There is a detailed consideration of information provided for students during their programme of study in *Outcomes from Institutional Audit 2007-09: Managing learning outcomes*. A short consideration is included here as a number of commentaries, features of good practice and recommendations relating to published information in the audit reports contain reference to information provided to students.

16   Overall the audit reports comment positively on information provided for students. Features of good practice relating to information for students were identified in 11 institutions, with three of these cases also relating to the quality of published information in general.[13] There were many comments about the move towards more electronic presentation of information and web-based resources were cited as features of good practice in six institutions. These included student portals;[14] specific web pages such as 'HelloUni' for students prior to their arrival;[15] 'Student

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[8] Leeds University College, Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, Queens University Belfast, Royal Veterinary College, University of Bristol, University of Chichester, University of Southampton, University of the Arts London.

[9] School of Oriental and African Studies, the School of Pharmacy.

[10] School of Pharmacy, paragraph 183.

[11] School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraphs 202, 203.

[12] City University London, paragraphs 38 and 114.

[13] London Business School; Southampton Solent University; University College London; University of Cambridge; University of Central Lancashire; University of Greenwich; University of Portsmouth; University of Salford; University of Sheffield; University of Surrey; University of Warwick.

[14] London Business School, paragraph 77; University of Greenwich, paragraph 158.

[15] Southampton Solent University, paragraph 196.

Help';[16] 'information channels';[17] and 'InSite', the institution's intranet.[18] The other two features of good practice referred to paper-based guides, the 'Academic Diary'[19] and the 'Big Guide'[20] given to students when they arrived.

17   The main area where the audit reports note deficiencies in published information was in the variation in student handbooks leading to recommendations for improvement in three institutions[21] and qualifications within the commentaries on public information for seven institutions.[22]

Students' experience of published and other information

18   Student views about the information provided for them by the institution were obtained during the audit process from the student written submission and meetings with groups of students during the briefing visit and audit visit. There were two areas of the student experience which were primarily explored with students: the information provided by the institution for potential applicants and that provided during their courses. These reflected two of the four key questions student representatives were invited to address in the student written submission: 'How accurate is the information that the Institution publishes?' and 'Do students know what is expected of them?' (*Handbook for Institutional Audit*, 2006).

Prospectuses and pre-arrival information

19   Most audit reports concluded that students were satisfied with the pre-entry information provided by prospectuses and other material, in particular on institutions' websites, and that the information matched their later experience. Typical comments from the student written submissions or meetings with students were that the information was 'accurate and reliable';[23] 'comprehensive and accurate';[24] 'an accurate account…that reflected their experience since arrival';[25] an 'accurate representation of their courses and experience';[26] 'fair and accurate';[27] 'full and accurate';[28] and 'accurate, informative and helpful'.[29] In one institution the quality of the information contributed to a general feature of good practice regarding information.[30]

20   In the few cases where some qualification regarding the accuracy of the information was expressed by students it was usually in relation to one specific aspect such as accommodation or facilities. Examples included 'complete and

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[16] University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 120.
[17] University of Salford, paragraph 129.
[18] University of Warwick, paragraph 194.
[19] University of Sheffield, paragraphs 93, 175.
[20] University of Surrey, 249.
[21] Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraph 142; University of Southampton, paragraph 135; University of the Arts London, paragraph 155.
[22] City University; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts; Queens University Belfast; Royal Veterinary College; University of Bristol; University of Southampton; University of the Arts London.
[23] Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 188.
[24] Goldsmiths College, paragraph 156.
[25] Loughborough University, paragraph 193.
[26] Southampton Solent University, paragraph 280.
[27] University of Bradford, paragraph 221.
[28] University of Essex, paragraph 138.
[29] University of Winchester, paragraph 120.
[30] University of Cambridge, paragraph 173.

accurate with the exception of the information about sports facilities and accommodation which tended to underplay the variability in quality';[31] 'useful and accurate…[however] some suggested that the University had exaggerated the variety of accommodation available and its proximity to other cities in the region'';[32] 'very accurate…[but that] some aspects of pre-arrival information, particularly concerning accommodation, could be improved';[33] and 'helpful and accurate…[but] failing to give applicants an accurate impression of the differences between the two campuses'.[34] In a few other instances, the reservations related to information for disabled students, such as 'students…confirmed the usefulness of the information…[although expressed]…some concern…that the physical challenges to mobility-impaired applicants posed by the…Campus were not adequately described'[35] and 'generally positive about the accuracy and range of information…[but]…information on facilities for the disabled needed enhancing'.[36] In only one instance was the variability considered sufficient to result in a recommendation 'that the University finds ways of ensuring that published information regarding college provision is clear and accurate, in order to allow students to make an informed choice at admission'.[37] Students in one institution also drew attention to complaints from the student body about 'hidden costs of studying in different schools' which had not been made clear in information available for applicants.[38]

21   There were few instances where students were reportedly critical about the information provided on academic provision, although these tended to be on specific aspects, for example 'general satisfaction with the accuracy of the prospectus with some concerns about the portrayal of joint honours programmes'[39] and 'some students commented on inaccurate course information…the great majority found information to be accurate'.[40] Although in one institution the students reported 'inadequate information…with respect to MA provision', the students also considered 'the Institute was underselling some aspects of provision' and 'the current website does not reflect the quality of the Institute compared with its competitor institutions and that it does not capture the '[Institution] experience''.[41]

22   The comments from students contributed to a recommendation for one institution that it should 'satisfy itself that all published information, including that which appears online, is accurate, accessible and current', although the report acknowledged 'the difficulties involved in communicating effectively with a diverse and dispersed student population'.[42]

Information provided during the programme

23   Overall students were positive about the information they received during their programmes, although the audit reports noted a greater variation of opinion in relation to this theme. Most students reported that they received handbooks and expressed satisfaction with the information they contained. Comments included

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[31] Aston University, paragraph 173.
[32] Keele University, paragraph 206.
[33] Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 217.
[34] University of Hull, paragraph 155.
[35] University College Falmouth, paragraph 170.
[36] University of Bath, paragraph 179.
[37] University of Oxford, paragraph 221.
[38] University of Birmingham, paragraph 174.
[39] University of Lincoln, paragraph 218.
[40] University of the West of England Bristol, paragraph 146.
[41] Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 152.
[42] City University London, paragraph 115.

'[students] find programme and module handbooks useful';[43] 'the handbooks were informative and useful for reference';[44] and 'students…indicated their satisfaction with the accuracy and utility of the handbooks'.[45]

24   Variability in handbooks between different programmes or departments was noted by students in a few institutions. For example, students 'found the handbooks helpful, informative and accurate but noted some variability in quality which, where it existed, was apparent particularly in the Dual Honours programmes',[46] and '[students] expressed concern about the variability of programme handbooks, which was particularly apparent to students on joint-degree programmes spanning more than one school'.[47] In one institution these concerns on variability contributed to the institution being recommended to specify 'the limits of acceptable variability for the provision of information provided to students, including the content of handbooks'.[48]

25   Other isolated criticisms about the provision of information expressed by students during the audit process led to specific comments, recommendations and qualifications in the report commentary. In one institution students had pointed out in their written submission that there was scope for improving communications, and this was reflected in the recommendation that the institution 'improve the effectiveness of the ways in which it brings academic information to the attention of students'.

26   In many institutions students reported that their major sources of information were electronic. Students were generally complimentary about information on websites with comments such as 'general satisfaction';[49] the 'first port of call';[50] 'most useful';[51] and the 'most important single source of information'.[52] However, in a few instances the comments from students in a few institutions were less favourable, including for example that 'online provision, website and intranet, were not entirely satisfactory' (a view also expressed by the institution);[53] that students found the 'structure of the intranet challenging and information…difficult to find…[but] generally regarded as accurate';[54] 'the website to be inadequate';[55] and that although the 'information portal was useful…navigation was difficult and some information hard to find'.[56]

Strategies, policies and processes for published information

27   A few institutions had formal strategies relating to published information, usually in a general sense and often linked to wider marketing and communication activities, and internal communications with staff. For example, institutions were reported to have a 'brief Information Strategy…alongside several related strategies';[57]

[43] University of Brighton, paragraph 195.
[44] Goldsmiths College, paragraph 156.
[45] Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 128; see also University of Chichester, paragraphs 180, 181 and Coventry University, paragraph 202.
[46] Keele University, paragraph 208.
[47] University of Southampton, paragraph 135.
[48] University of East Anglia, paragraph 164.
[49] University of Leeds, paragraph 258.
[50] Rose Bruford College.
[51] University of Liverpool, paragraph 161.
[52] University of Northampton, paragraph 132.
[53] Royal College of Art, paragraph 247
[54] Royal College of Music, paragraph 221.
[55] School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 205.
[56] Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 210.
[57] University of Bath, paragraph 177.

a 'comprehensive information strategy' and a 'marketing and communication strategy';[58] an information strategy 'focusing mainly on the technical aspects of information management' and a marketing and communications strategy;[59] an Information and Communications Strategy including 'aims relevant to published information…the delivery of effective communications to all stakeholders';[60] and a 'university-wide staff communications strategy'.[61] In a few institutions specific groups or committees had responsibility for developing and implementing strategies relating to information.[62]

28   Specific web or website strategies and policies and guidelines were identified in a few institutions, often directed by specific groups or committees, although the audit reports contained little comment on them.[63] In one institution the 'primary objective [of the strategy] is the rationalisation of web-content on the basis that "less is more",' which the audit report noted students confirmed as an 'appropriate aim'.[64] In another institution, a website quality review had identified a need to review the institution's publishing model.[65]

29   Formal policies relating to information were identified in a few institutions, often with associated guidelines for publications. The audit reports indicate that these could be titled in various ways.[66] Policies specific to websites were also noted in the audit reports. These included a 'Web publishing policy';[67] a '"Web-first" policy';[68] and a 'Web Controls Policy';[69] while another audit report described 'a detailed website policy, formulating clear procedures and roles and responsibilities for those seeking to develop electronic materials'.[70] In other institutions such policies were reported to be under development.[71]

Processes for ensuring accuracy of published information

30   The final locus of responsibility for checking published information was identified in many audit reports. For prospectuses and other pre-admission information this was often a central institutional office such as the Advancement Service;[72] Marketing Admissions and External Relations Department;[73] Marketing Office;[74] Academic Registry;[75] or Registry.[76] In some institutions specific senior managers were noted as being charged with the final responsibility for signing off the

[58] University of Brighton, paragraphs 190, 191.

[59] University of Sheffield, paragraph 172.

[60] Southampton Solent University, paragraph 277.

[61] Salford University, paragraph 131.

[62] University of Brighton, paragraph 190; see also Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 122.

[63] Bournemouth University, paragraph 139; De Montfort University, paragraph 225; University of East Anglia, paragraph 161; University of Oxford, paragraph 218.

[64] De Montfort University, paragraph 225.

[65] University of Bournemouth, paragraph 139

[66] See for example University of Exeter, paragraph 246; Goldsmiths College, paragraph 148; University of Winchester, paragraphs 115, 247.

[67] Goldsmiths College, paragraph 148.

[68] School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 203.

[69] City University London, paragraph 113.

[70] University of Buckingham, paragraph 119.

[71] University of Hull, paragraph 158.

[72] University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 188.

[73] University of Chichester, paragraph 177.

[74] University of Essex, paragraph 135.

[75] Keele University, paragraph 203.

[76] London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraph 102.

information.[77] However, in one institution the audit report noted that it was not clear who was responsible for signing off and/or updating some published information, with a consequent potential for confusion. The institution was therefore recommended 'to make explicit the formal responsibilities of different postholders for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of published information'.[78]

31   In most institutions responsibility was placed on faculties and departments for detailed information on programmes, typically entrusted to an academic course or programme manager with the head of department or school or the faculty dean having ultimate local responsibility.[79] In some institutions there were checks on the accuracy of information at both faculty and department or school level.[80] One institution stressed the importance of producing accurate and reliable information as part of the training of heads of school and school directors of teaching and learning.[81] It was not always the case that there was a further check on information produced by faculties or departments; for example in one institution there was reported to be no central overview.[82]

32   A number of institutions had independent mechanisms in place to check the accuracy of published information. There was explicit reference in several reports to scrutiny of published information as part of annual programme monitoring[83] and periodic review processes.[84] In one case the student recruitment, admissions and marketing department engaged in various activities to monitor the accuracy and effectiveness of the institution's published information, including 'mystery shopping'.[85] In other institutions, monitoring of published information was carried out by committees such as the External Relations Committee;[86] the Student Target, Admissions and Recruitment Committee;[87] and the Quality and Standards Sub-committee.[88]

33   In some reports it was noted that oversight of institutional websites was the responsibility of a different person or office to that for printed materials, including for example the Marketing section of the Commercial and Facilities Directorate;[89] a Web Content Manager;[90] or the Head of Marketing and Web Coordinator.[91] There was

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[77] See for example Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 131; Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 185; Bath Spa University, paragraph 175; Keele University, paragraph 205; University of Bradford, paragraph 219; University of Buckingham, paragraph 119; University of Chichester, paragraph 178.

[78] University of Reading, paragraph 202.

[79] See for example University College Falmouth, paragraph 166; Keele University, paragraph 203; Loughborough University, paragraph 189; Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 113; Rose Bruford College, paragraph 172; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 204; University of Greenwich, paragraph 155; University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 181.

[80] For example University of Reading, paragraph 202.

[81] University of Reading, paragraph 203.

[82] Queens University Belfast, paragraph 211.

[83] For example Keele University, paragraph 208; Middlesex University, paragraph 95; Royal College of Art, paragraph 258; University of Bradford, paragraph 221; University of Liverpool, paragraph 161.

[84] For example University of Bath, paragraph 177; University of Exeter, paragraph 250; University of Hull, paragraph 159; University of Leicester, paragraph 100; University of Liverpool, paragraph 161.

[85] University of Sheffield, paragraph 172.

[86] University of Bradford, paragraph 219.

[87] University of Lincoln, paragraph 216.

[88] University of Sheffield, paragraph 174.

[89] Keele University, paragraph 207.

[90] University of Buckingham, paragraph 119.

evidence in the audit reports of greater local responsibility for the content of websites than for other published information.

34   Overall, although there was little explicit textual comment in the audit reports on the effectiveness of the processes employed by institutions to check the accuracy and reliability of published information, the generally positive tone of the commentaries indicates that the processes were indeed effective in most institutions.

Information published on the TQI and Unistats websites

Institutions audited in academic year 2006-7

35   The seven institutions audited during the academic year 2006-7 were required to submit information to the TQI website and to make available other information as defined by HEFCE 2003/51 (see paragraphs 3-5). The audit reports indicate the response to the requirements by institutions was mixed, with the detail of the commentary given also varied.

36   There was no specific reference to the TQI website in one report, although the accessibility of complete and accurate information on policies and procedures on the institution's intranet was identified as a feature of good practice.[92] Similarly, in two other institutions, the intranet was found to play a significant part in disseminating information on policies and procedures.[93] The locus of responsibility for published information was defined in two other reports[94] and a further report simply repeated the institution's claim in its briefing paper that it 'met the Higher Education Funding Council for England's requirements',[95] in all three cases with no comment on the completeness or accuracy of the information provided.

37   The final institution audited in 2006-7 admitted that it had 'not engaged with the TQI website, and is awaiting its relaunch'.[96] The institution was also advised to expedite progress of a planned quality assurance manual, including communication of its contents and purpose to all staff.[97]

Institutions audited in academic years 2007-8 and 2008-9

38   All other institutions whose audit reports are considered in this paper were required to publish information as outlined in HEFCE 2006/45 with the expectation that this would be examined during Institutional Audit (see paragraphs 6-8 above). However, in a quarter of the audit reports there was no specific reference to either meeting the requirements or publication of data on the Unistats website.[98] Some of

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[91] University of Chichester, paragraph 181.

[92] Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 139.

[93] Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 132; University College Falmouth, paragraph 167

[94] School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 202; Royal College of Music, paragraph 219.

[95] Royal College of Art, paragraph 252.

[96] School of Pharmacy, paragraph 183.

[97] School of Pharmacy, paragraphs 44, 45, 66, 69.

[98] Anglia Ruskin University; Central School of Speech and Drama; Institute of Cancer Research; 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 Birmingham; University of Central Lancashire; University of Chichester; University of East Anglia; University of Essex; University of Exeter; University of Hull; University of Kent; University of Northampton; University of Oxford; University of the Arts London; University of Wolverhampton; University of York.

these institutions were audited during the transition period of the autumn term 2007-8 when the Unistats website was not publicly available and so it was not possible for the audit team to check the information.

39   Most other institutions were considered to have appropriate procedures in place to ensure the accuracy and completeness of information and to be meeting the requirements set out by HEFCE. Data published on the Unistats website was based on HESA returns and the NSS results, and some reports referred to central institutional procedures for checking and submitting the data. Most reports referred to a central administrative office with this responsibility, for example the Planning and Statistics Office;[99] Recruitment, Admissions and Student Records (Student Records team);[100] the Academic Registry;[101] and the Planning Support Office;[102] although in some institutions it fell to a specific individual (or individuals), for example an Assistant Registrar in the Management Information Unit;[103] the Planning and Information Officer;[104] the Planning Officer and Director of Finance;[105] and the two Deputy Principals.[106]

40   Institutions were offered the opportunity to add a commentary to the Unistats website. However, there is very little reference in the audit reports to this function being taken up, with only three reports noting examples of such commentaries[107] and three reports indicating that the institution had decided not to provide one.[108] One institution was reported to have been openly critical of the Unistats website, providing more detailed quantitative data for prospective students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level via its own website.[109]

41   Most institutions published the required qualitative information, although there was more variation in practice. There were examples of good practice noted in the reports, especially in the provision of information on academic quality processes. These included the 'comprehensive Quality intranet pages [which] contribute significantly to the effective communication of policy and procedures to staff';[110] 'the regular updating of the AQA [Procedures and Policies for Academic Quality Assurance: Programmes and Students], in particular the current review of the AQA as part of a wider University staff communications strategy';[111] 'the detailed advice and guidance in the Academic Manual which is available electronically, both internally and externally';[112] 'the range of information designed to make the University's Quality Framework more accessible';[113] and the Academic Diary and Student Handbook which formed 'a single comprehensive source of information on

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[99] University of Greenwich, paragraph 155.
[100] Roehampton University, paragraph 130.
[101] Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 207.
[102] University of Reading, paragraph 211.
[103] Coventry University, paragraph 199.
[104] Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 83.
[105] University of the West of England Bristol, paragraph 118.
[106] Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraph 143.
[107] University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 192; University of Liverpool, paragraph 166; University of Reading, paragraph 211.
[108] Bournemouth University, paragraph 145; De Montfort University, paragraph 221; University of Leicester, paragraph 96.
[109] University of Cambridge, paragraph 170.
[110] Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 23.
[111] University of Salford, paragraph 131.
[112] University College London, paragraph 29.
[113] University of Hull, paragraph 19.

the University's policies, procedures and regulatory requirements' and was issued to students at the start of their programme.[114]

42   However, it was not always clear in the audit reports whether this qualitative information was accessible externally or only to students and staff within the institution. There is some explicit reference to external availability, for example 'the University has a policy of giving public access through its website to most of the information it produces on the quality and standards of its provision';[115] 'each deanery has a set of web pages, underpinned by central procedures and policies, which provide area-focused information for students and external users';[116] and the 'University's Teaching Quality Information for both external stakeholders and staff members is published through a dedicated home page'.[117] In other reports it appears that the information was only available internally, for example the 'intranet is used extensively by the University to provide a wide range of documentation and committee-related material…in particular, the web-based Academic Quality Handbook';[118] and 'information about academic standards and quality…located on the intranet, which is only accessible to staff and students'.[119]

43   In only one institution was there an explicit statement in the audit report that there was no evidence that the documentation listed in Annex F of HEFCE 2006/45 was being made publicly available; although this omission did not result in a formal recommendation.[120] In contrast, some institutions were reported to have gone beyond the basic expectations and made more information available. For example, a few institutions were reported to publish the minutes of major committees on their websites;[121] with others publishing similar material on their intranets.[122]

Sharing external examiners' reports

44   One major feature of the changes in national requirements for publicly available information from 2007-8 was that institutions should share external examiners' reports with their student representatives, for example through staff-student committees (HEFCE 2006/45). Most institutions were noted in the audit reports to have taken steps to meet this expectation, although there was considerable variation in the methods used and the degree of alignment with the requirement. The commentary in the audit reports on this topic also varied.

45   About half the institutions were found to have mechanisms in place to share external examiners' reports with students 'as a matter of course'. Of these only seven[123] did so via staff-student committees, which was the mechanism mentioned in HEFCE 2006/45. In other institutions, students saw the reports through a variety of

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[114] University of Sheffield, paragraphs 93, 175.
[115] University of Bristol, paragraph 139.
[116] Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 209.
[117] University of Portsmouth, paragraph 182.
[118] University of Sunderland, paragraph 119.
[119] Leeds Trinity University College, paragraph 84.
[120] Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts, paragraph 155.
[121] University of Essex, paragraph 139; University of Leeds, paragraph 262; University of Portsmouth, paragraph 179; University of Winchester, paragraph 114.
[122] Ravensbourne College, paragraph 139; Rose Bruford College, paragraph 174; University of Brighton, paragraph 196; University of the West of England Bristol, paragraph 149.
[123] University of Bath, paragraph 59; University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 40; University of Durham, paragraph 39; University of Exeter, paragraph 44; University of Salford, paragraph 32; University of Southampton, paragraph 136; University of Warwick, paragraph 41.

different types of committee, at programme;[124] departmental or school;[125] faculty or university[126] level; or as part of annual monitoring procedures.[127]

46   Two institutions had gone further and made the external examiners' reports more widely available to students through a virtual learning environment[128] or a web-based 'document control centre',[129] with another institution noting that reports in one area were available on the virtual learning environment.[130] However, despite the mechanisms being in place in these institutions, meetings with students during the audit process revealed that students were not always aware of the opportunities available for seeing external examiners' reports.[131]

47   A number of audit reports contained comments which were critical about institutions' procedures for sharing the external examiners' reports with students. However, on the surface it was not always clear how the practices in these institutions differed significantly from those noted above. For example, in one institution where students' access to external examiners' reports was noted to be 'embedded in annual monitoring', the audit report suggested that 'further consideration [be given] to HEFCE circular 2006/45'.[132] In another case, where 'student representatives are party to the discussion about external examiner reports at faculty learning and teaching committees', the audit team concluded that 'the University might consider doing more to promote the sharing of external examiner reports with students'.[133] Another institution only made the reports available 'on request' and was 'encouraged to explore further how it might routinely provide external examiners reports to student representatives'.[134] Further, in one institution where reports were shared with students through programme monitoring and review processes, it was recommended that the institution 'develop a more formalised and systematic way of making external examiner reports accessible to student representatives on a programme'.[135]

48   In a few institutions mechanisms for sharing external examiners' reports were in place but not always followed. In one case, the institution's own process required reports to be considered by staff-student committees but the evidence examined in the audit found this was not always fulfilled. The institution was recommended 'to 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'.[136] In another institution where it was reported that there was only 'limited evidence' that external examiners' reports were shared with students routinely through annual monitoring,

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[124] For example Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 44; University of Brighton, paragraph 48; University of Lincoln, paragraph 66.
[125] University of Leeds, paragraph 267.
[126] Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 39.
[127] for example Southampton Solent University, paragraph 63; University of Bradford, paragraph 223; University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 30; University of York, paragraph 55
[128] University of Oxford, paragraph 217.
[129] Rose Bruford College, paragraph 59.
[130] University of Bath, paragraph 62.
[131] For example University of Bradford, paragraph 223; University of Sussex, paragraph 33; University of Warwick, paragraph 41.
[132] University of Essex, paragraph 31.
[133] Keele University, paragraph 53.
[134] University of Bristol, paragraph 139.
[135] Goldsmiths College, paragraph 154.
[136] University of Hull, paragraph 160.

the institution was recommended to ensure 'that external examiner reports are shared with students in accordance with the HEFCE publication…06/45'.[137]

49   Summaries, rather than the full external examiners' reports, were made available to students in five institutions.[138] In one case this resulted in the institution being recommended to 'provide student representatives with external examiner reports in accordance with the HEFCE publication…2006/45'.[139]

50   Where no mechanism for students to see external examiners' reports was in place the audit report included comments encouraging the institution 'to share external examiners' reports…with students at the earliest opportunity'[140] and suggesting that the institution 'should develop a suitable mechanism for communicating this information to all student representatives as part of annual review and in accordance with the expectations of HEFCE'.[141] In seven audit reports no comment was made about whether external examiner reports were shared with students.[142]

51   It is clear that at the time of the audits analysed in this paper, there was still some way to go before all institutions shared external examiners' reports with students 'as a matter of course', but this was viewed in various ways by audit teams depending on the circumstances of each institution.

Programme specifications

52   The Institutional Audit process paid particular attention to the production and publication of programme specifications by institutions, and most audit reports indicate that institutions met the requirements for making programme specifications available. There were exceptions in two institutions audited early in the review period. One institution had 'concluded that programme specifications were unnecessary as the information was available from existing documents'.[143] In another case, the institution was recommended to 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,' as response to a recommendation in a previous audit report 'had been slow'.[144]

53   The expectation stated in the *Handbook* was that programme specifications should be publicly available. In 30 audit reports it was stated explicitly that this was the case,[145] with one institution doing so only 'on request'[146] and another only making

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[137] Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 130.

[138] University College London, paragraph 65; University of Northampton, paragraph 22; University of Portsmouth, paragraph 55; University of Reading, paragraph 47; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 25.

[139] University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 25.

[140] University of the West of England Bristol, paragraph 72.

[141] Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 153; see also Leeds Trinity University College, paragraph 86; Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 50.

[142] Bath Spa University; City University London; London Business School; Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance; University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester; University of the Arts London; University of Winchester.

[143] Royal College of Art, paragraph 59.

[144] School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 70.

[145] Bournemouth University; City University London; Coventry University; Liverpool Hope University; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts; Loughborough University; Rose Bruford

available versions that contain 'core information'.[147] In 13 institutions the audit reports indicated that programme specifications were only available internally,[148] although three were in the process of making them more accessible.[149] Two institutions only provided programme specifications internally 'on request', and in these cases the audit report contained a suggestion that the institution should take steps to rectify the situation.[150] In the other 32 reports there was either no explicit reference to the availability of programme specifications outside the institution or the wording was unclear.

54   The production of programme specifications as an integral part of the programme approval process was explicitly noted in almost half of the audit reports.[151] In contrast, a few audit reports noted that institutions had doubts about the utility of programme specifications for students. One institution described their primary use as 'quality assurance documents…that…hold little appeal for students', with more accessible information provided through student handbooks.[152] Another institution considered they were 'formal records of the curriculum delivered' and as such 'of most use to academic and administrative officers rather than prospective students' believing that prospective students' 'requirements for information are better served by the University's prospectuses and recruitment material' and that 'programme handbooks written specifically for undergraduates/and or postgraduates are a better medium for communicating the detailed information about programmes'.[153] Staff in a third institution stated that programme specifications 'are not particularly accessible documents and that the University prefers to publish more user-friendly course information on its external website'.[154]

College; Royal College of Music; Southampton Solent University; University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester; University College London; University of Bradford; University of Bristol; University of Cambridge; University of Chichester; University of Durham; University of East Anglia; University of Essex; University of Exeter; University of Hertfordshire; University of Kent; University of Leeds; University of Oxford; University of Portsmouth; University of Reading; University of Sheffield; University of Sussex; University of the West of England Bristol; University of Warwick; University of Winchester.

[146] University of East Anglia, paragraph 34.

[147] University of Durham, paragraph 48.

[148] Aston University; Bath Spa University; De Montfort University; Goldsmiths College; Keele University; Leeds Metropolitan University; Nottingham Trent University; Queens University Belfast; School of Pharmacy; University of Brighton; University of Lincoln; University of Salford; University of Surrey.

[149] Keele University, paragraph 209; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 86; Queens University Belfast, paragraph 207.

[150] University of Lincoln, paragraph 41; University of Surrey, paragraph 71.

[151] Bath Spa University, paragraph 32; Coventry University, paragraph 56; Leeds College of Music, paragraph 64; Goldsmiths College, paragraph 38; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 45 and 127; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 42; Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 43; Open University, paragraph 61; Queens University Belfast, paragraph 55; Roehampton University, paragraph 23; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 60; University College London, paragraph 74; University of Bath, paragraph 66; University of Bradford, paragraphs 53 and 68; University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 60; University of Chichester, paragraph 179; University of East Anglia, paragraph 34; University of Leeds, paragraph 46; University of Leicester, paragraph 97; University of Liverpool, paragraph 37; University of Reading, paragraph 51; University of Salford, paragraph 40; University of Sheffield, paragraph 26; University of Sunderland, paragraph 50; University of Surrey, paragraphs 45 and 70; University of the Arts London, paragraph 33; University of Warwick, paragraph 45; University of York, paragraph 60.

[152] University of Kent, paragraph 41.

[153] University of Sussex, paragraph 171.

[154] University of Brighton, paragraph 60; see also Keele University, paragraph 209.

55   Overall the audit reports indicate that programme specifications were being produced and used appropriately in most institutions. Terms such as 'accurate',[155] 'clear',[156] 'comprehensive',[157] 'detailed',[158] and 'effective'[159] were used to describe programme specifications in a few reports. However, in a number of institutions the link between intended learning outcomes of modules and those of programmes, or between learning outcomes and assessment was found to require further attention.[160] In some cases this led to a formal recommendation for action.

Information relating to collaborative provision

56   The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* (QAA 2004) places two responsibilities on the awarding institution with respect to published information:

•   'An up-to-date and authoritative record of the awarding institution's collaborative partnerships…and a listing of its collaborative programmes…should form part of the institution's publicly available information' (precept A4). This is commonly referred to as a 'collaborative (provision) register' or 'register of collaborative provision'.

•   'The awarding institution should monitor regularly the information given by the partner organisation…to prospective students and those registered on a collaborative programme' (precept A27).

In the audit reports analysed in this paper, 53 reports discuss the institution's collaborative provision. Thirteen institutions underwent a separate Audit of Collaborative Provision and 10 had no collaborative provision.

Register of collaborative provision

57   Just under half the reports which include discussion of the institution's collaborative provision contain an explicit reference to the existence of a register of collaborative provision, with fewer than half of these being clearly described as externally available. Registers were maintained by a variety of central institutional offices such as the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office,[161] the Education Support Unit,[162] the Teaching Quality Support Division,[163] the Quality Support

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[155] Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraph 142; Goldsmiths College, paragraph 153; Rose Bruford College, paragraph 63; University of Kent, paragraph 136.
[156] Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 42.
[157] Leeds College of Music, paragraph 49; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 42; University of Lincoln, paragraph 40; University of Salford, paragraph 130.
[158] Coventry University, paragraph 173; London Business School, paragraph 77; University of Sheffield, paragraph 26.
[159] Open University, paragraph 61; Rose Bruford College, paragraph 63.
[160] City University London, paragraph 38; Keele University, paragraph 59; Leeds College of Music, paragraph 50; Leeds Trinity University College, paragraph 17; Roehampton University, paragraph 23; Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 33; School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraphs 70, 98, 153; University of Bristol, paragraphs 25, 26, 27, 29; University of Chichester, paragraphs 54, 55; University of Leeds paragraph 47; University of Surrey, paragraphs 45, 70; University of York, paragraphs 61, 63.
[161] University of Bath, paragraph 159.
[162] University of Bristol, paragraph 117.
[163] University of Liverpool, paragraph 129.

Section,[164] Education partnerships[165] and the Academic Support Office[166] reflecting different locus of responsibility for collaborative provision.

58   Of the registers described as being available externally, a third were reported to be complete and accurate.[167] Others were described as providing 'brief details',[168] 'limited',[169] 'should be enhanced',[170] or as not including 'courses run as accredited provision, dual-award provision and Erasmus partnerships'.[171] In another case, it was suggested that the institution should look systematically at its collaborative arrangements 'to ensure that its register of collaborative activity is accurate and complete'.[172] In another institution, the audit report noted that there were 'omissions', and 'discrepancies in recording some review processes'; consequently, the register 'was not complete or definitive and…not…an accurate record of the University's collaborative arrangements', and the institution was recommended to address this.[173] Another report noted that the register 'does not provide details of the programmes provided through each collaboration' and that the institution 'would benefit from a more coherent and readily accessible register'.[174]

59   Where the register was not noted to be externally available, other comments were made in the audit reports about its accuracy. One register was found to be 'incomplete' although the report noted that it was 'subsequently…corrected'.[175] Two institutions were reported specifically not to make the register publicly available.[176] Other qualitative assessments relating to collaborative provision registers in the reports included that it was 'found to be an authoritative record',[177] and 'a comprehensive listing',[178] while in another case the register had 'not been updated [for 14 months at the time of the briefing visit]' although by the time of the audit visit 'the updating had been completed'.[179] In conclusion, the audit reports indicate that there was considerable variation between institutions in the accuracy, completeness and public availability of the registers of collaborative provision.

Monitoring information published by partners

60   More than half the audit reports which contained discussion of the institution's collaborative provision referred to information published by partner institutions, generally in relation to the processes by which the information was checked. Reference was made to defining responsibilities for published information, primarily relating to publicity and promotional activities, in memoranda of agreements

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[164] University of Surrey, paragraph 18.
[165] University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 140.
[166] University of York, paragraph 158.
[167] University of Bristol, paragraph 117; University of Warwick, paragraph 152; University of York, paragraph 158.
[168] Goldsmiths College, paragraph 113.
[169] Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 189.
[170] De Montfort University, paragraph 174.
[171] Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 151.
[172] Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 172.
[173] University of Northampton, paragraphs 85, 97.
[174] Lancaster University, paragraph 93.
[175] University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 163.
[176] University College London, paragraph 187; University of the West of England Bristol, paragraph 105.
[177] University of Lincoln, paragraph 171.
[178] University of Liverpool, paragraph 129.
[179] Aston University, paragraph 127.

with collaborative partners.[180] The audit reports described institutions applying 'strict rules to publicity information'[181] and publicity being 'governed by University protocols'.[182] However, in one report it was noted that there was 'no specific reference to the responsibility of the University to oversee all publicity and the partner institutions to seek agreement on all such material, although they variously do indicate that the partners should themselves ensure accuracy of such information' in the legal agreements seen by the audit team.[183]

61   The audit reports indicate that the responsibility for checking the information could sit with a central institutional office or with an individual. Examples given in the audit reports include the Office of Associated Institutions,[184] Academic Registrar,[185] Academic Standards and Quality Service,[186] Marketing and Communications Office,[187] Quality Support Office,[188] and Board of Collaborative Studies.[189] At a local level, they include the 'link tutor',[190] 'the cognate department'[191] 'schools',[192] 'a moderator',[193] the 'collaborative provision visitor',[194] 'departments/schools'[195] and 'University course coordinators'.[196] In one institution the locus of responsibility depended on the type of collaboration,[197] and in another the process relied on 'informal arrangements', although the institution was 'developing a strategy' for both central and local oversight of information.[198]

62   Only a few qualitative comments were made specifically in the audit reports on either the accuracy of the information published by collaborative partners or the effectiveness of the processes for checking its accuracy, although the topic was implicitly covered within wider comments on published information and the management of collaborative provision. In one case where it was reported that 'University course coordinators are asked to monitor the quality and accuracy of promotional material' the audit report concluded that 'this process is happening'.[199] In another institution the report noted 'that the arrangements…put in place to ensure the accuracy of published information…were generally effective'.[200] Spot checks on web-based materials produced by the partner were noted in one institution.[201]

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[180] City University London, paragraphs 92, 113; Goldsmiths College, paragraph 114; Lancaster University, paragraph 93; University of Exeter, paragraph 213; University of Southampton, paragraph 108; University of Winchester paragraph 116; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 174.
[181] University of Leicester, paragraph 99.
[182] Bournemouth University, paragraph 112.
[183] Loughborough University, paragraph 166.
[184] Lancaster University, paragraph 93.
[185] Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 131.
[186] Southampton Solent University, paragraph 287.
[187] University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 185.
[188] University of Reading, paragraphs 169, 170.
[189] University of Sheffield, paragraph 146.
[190] Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 162.
[191] Loughborough University, paragraph 166.
[192] Queens University Belfast, paragraph 212.
[193] Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 187; Roehampton University, paragraph 103.
[194] University of Birmingham, paragraph 138.
[195] University of Liverpool, paragraph 165.
[196] University of Warwick, paragraph 169.
[197] University of Surrey, paragraph 248.
[198] University of Northampton, paragraph 133.
[199] University of Warwick, paragraph 169.
[200] University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 150.
[201] City University London, paragraph 113.

63   A few reports noted problems with the accuracy of information produced by collaborative partners: these related either to the lack of a clear process for checking information or the process not being followed properly, leading to incorrect or inconsistent information on partner websites. A lack of a 'systematic approach' to checking published information was noted in two institutions.[202] In one of these cases, the resulting 'inaccuracies' led to the institution being recommended to 'review the strategic oversight and overall management of collaborative provision to ensure that procedures and practice take appropriate account of the precepts of *Section 2* of the *Code of practice*', particularly in relation to published information.[203]

64   In one institution the audit report noted 'some inconsistency between information on the University web pages and those of some partner colleges which could lead to confusion for students'.[204] In another case, although the information on partner websites was found to be 'generally accurate', there were some aspects of the relationship with the institution that were unclear leading to a recommendation that the institution 'ensure that public information for applicants to collaborative provision published on the websites of its partner colleges makes clear the relationship between the University and the partner, the location of study and the progression and transfer requirements from Foundation Degrees to honours level study'.[205]

65   Overall most institutions were found to have appropriate processes in place to monitor the accuracy of information published by their collaborative partners. These processes appeared to be generally effective with only isolated instances of them breaking down.

The themes in context

66   The analysis above indicates that on the whole, institutions met the expectations placed upon them for publishing information that was accurate and reliable, as set out in various publications by HEFCE.

67   The new method of Institutional review in England and Northern Ireland (replacing the Institutional Audit process which resulted in the audit reports analysed in this paper) will have an even greater focus on published information. One of the requirements set out by the sponsoring bodies (HEFCE, the Department for Employment and Learning, Universities UK and GuildHE) was that 'the revised method…be clearer about the importance attached to the provision of robust and comparable public information'.[206] In order to address this, from 2012-13 Institutional review will include a specific judgement on the quality of public information, including that produced for students and applicants, rather than the commentary on published information made in the Institutional Audit process. This is also likely to result in greater consistency in the coverage of the topic in audit reports.

68   The increasing emphasis on the importance of published information is also reflected within developments to restructure the Academic Infrastructure into the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, of which Part C will be *Providing information*

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[202] Goldsmiths College, paragraph 114; Loughborough University, paragraph 192.

[203] Loughborough University, paragraph 166.

[204] Aston University, paragraph 173.

[205] Bath Spa University, paragraph 177.

[206] QAA 2011*. Institutional review of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland. Operational description*, www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/Pages/IRENI_Operational.aspx.

about higher education.[207] This is taking place alongside work led by the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group to implement the production of Key Information Sets (KIS) as information for prospective students. These are expected to be made available by September 2012.

Trends

69   This is the first *Outcomes from Institutional Audit* paper specifically to consider published information and therefore direct comparison with conclusions drawn about previous cycles of audit is difficult. However, published information has been considered in specific contexts in a number of papers, in particular those relating to the student written submission; programme specifications; admission and recruitment; and collaborative provision.

70   Student views about the information provided by their institution were reviewed in *The contribution of the student written submission to Institutional Audit*. The overall conclusion to be drawn from the student written submissions as reflected in the audit reports was that 'most comments on the accuracy of information provided by institutions for their students were positive and, importantly, there was little evidence that institutions had significantly misrepresented themselves' (paragraph 45). The findings in this paper are similar.

71   The developments relating to the use of programme specifications noted in the *Outcomes from Institutional Audit: Series 2* paper on the topic can be seen to have continued in the audit reports analysed in this paper. A number of institutions continue to consider the primary role of programmes specifications to be in the programme approval process, but more institutions appear to be making use of programme specifications directly to inform students and potential applicants.

72   The availability and accuracy of pre-admission information was considered in the paper *Recruitment and admission of students*. This concluded that 'with very few exceptions, information for prospective students was well managed and provided them with the information they needed in order to make choices about what, and where, to study'. This conclusion is still valid on the basis of the evidence considered here, and is supported by the students' reported experience of the information provided by institutions.

73   Awarding institutions' oversight of collaborative partners' information has been considered within three previous *Outcomes* papers: *Collaborative provision in the Institutional Audit reports* in both previous series, *Outcomes from Institutional Audit* and in *Student support and guidance* in *Outcomes from Collaborative provision audit*. The conclusions drawn in the latter paper were: 'Overall, the audit reports indicate that there was good oversight of publicity…issued by partner institutions, and effective procedures for ensuring accuracy'. Similar conclusions are drawn here. The number of recommendations relating to institutions' procedures for the monitoring of partners' published information identified in the 76 audit reports considered here is fewer than in the datasets analysed in previous *Outcomes* papers, which may suggest that processes have been improved. The areas of concern were found to be similar, primarily relating to formalising processes for monitoring published information.

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[207] QAA 2011. *Changes to the Academic Infrastructure: final report*, www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/changes-to-academic-infrastructure.aspx.

Conclusions

74   The majority of audit reports concluded that institutions maintained accurate and complete published information on the quality of their educational provision and the standards of their awards, supported by effective checking mechanisms. Where there were areas of concern these generally related to specific aspects of the provision of information and not to the overall accuracy and completeness.

75   The audit reports indicate that institutions have on the whole met the requirements set out by HEFCE for information which should be publicly available. However, there is room for some institutions to improve the systematic sharing of external examiners' reports with students.

76   There is a significant similarity in the conclusions of this paper with those drawn on topics related to published information in papers in previous series of *Outcomes* papers. With the raising of the profile of public information in the new method of Institutional review in England and Northern Ireland operating from 2011-12, improvements are likely to continue, alongside more detailed and consistent reporting.

Appendix A: Features of good practice relating to published information

- The robust review mechanisms for collaborative provision (Bath Spa University, paragraph 138).
- The high level of integration and cooperation with local and regional collaborative partners (De Montfort University, paragraph 186).
- The development at departmental level of detailed discipline-related assessment criteria, based on the College's generic criteria (Goldsmiths College, paragraph 38).
- The quantity and quality of information available to students on the Portal and in the form of published guides, both prior to and following their admission (London Business School, paragraph 77).
- 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 development and continuing enhancement of the HelloUni site as a support for students during the recruitment process, particularly prior to their arrival at the University (Southampton Solent University, paragraph 196).
- 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, 215).
- The quality of published information (University of Cambridge, paragraph 173).
- The integrated student support service, known as the 'i', for its accessibility and provision of high quality information, guidance and support for students (University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 121).
- 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 development of mechanisms across the University for the consideration and publicising of responses to National Student Survey results (University of Leeds, paragraphs 117, 142).
- The easily accessible and well laid out 'Student' and 'Staff' Channels on the University website (University of Salford, paragraph 129).
- Regular updating of the Procedures and Policies for Academic Quality Assurance: Programmes and Students (AQA) and in particular the current review of the Assurance as part of a wider University staff communications strategy (University of Salford, paragraph 131).
- The Academic Diary, which provides students with a single, concise and comprehensive source of information about the University and its policies, procedures and regulatory requirements (University of Sheffield, paragraphs 93, 175).
- The Greenwich Portal as a comprehensive and effective means of communication with staff and students (University of Greenwich, paragraph 158).
- The accuracy and comprehensive nature of the information provided to students (University of Portsmouth, paragraph 186).
- The comprehensive nature of student induction, including the Big Guide and Project Welcome (University of Surrey, paragraph 249).

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- The comprehensive information, including academic statistics, available for staff and students on Insite, the University's intranet (University of Warwick, paragraph 194).

Appendix B: Recommendations relating to published information

- Consider whether the current approaches to collaborative provision might be strengthened in line with the University's commitment to effective oversight of the student experience and the contribution of students to quality assurance (Anglia Ruskin University, paragraphs 43, 68, 151, 153, 158).
- The University reviews the range and extent of support which it provides to postgraduate research students, particularly on entry and in the early stages of their research (Aston University, paragraph 152).
- Ensure that public information for applicants to collaborative provision published on the websites of its partner colleges makes clear the relationship between the University and the partner, the location of study and the progression and transfer requirements from Foundation Degrees to honours level study (Bath Spa University, paragraph 177).
- 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, paragraph 142).
- Satisfy itself that all published information, including that which is online, is accurate, accessible and current (City University London, paragraph 115).
- Establish a more comprehensive register for the recording of the College's collaborative partnerships (Goldsmiths College, paragraph 113).
- Complete the development and implementation of the new framework for the management of standards and quality in collaborative provision (Goldsmiths College, paragraph 117).
- Ensure that postgraduate taught students are issued with information about complaints procedures and reconsider the amount of time in which students can make an appeal (Institute for Cancer Research, paragraph 144).
- 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).
- 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, paragraph 130).
- Revise its module descriptor forms to make clear the relationship between module and programme learning outcomes (Leeds Trinity University College, paragraph 17).
- Undertake a formal review of its engagement with an overseas partner institution (Leeds Trinity University College, paragraphs 74, 84).
- Facilitate student access to the rules on progression and classification of awards (Leeds Trinity University College, paragraph 85).
- Improve the effectiveness of the ways in which it brings academic information to the attention of students (Leeds Trinity University College, paragraph 86).
- Ensure that further expeditious action is taken to address the problems of student access to electronic resources (Liverpool Hope University, paragraphs 19, 106, 210).

- Engage more thoroughly with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, and ensures that its practices take full account of the precepts (particularly with regard to the partnership register and provision of certificates/transcripts) (Liverpool Hope University, paragraphs 154, 175, 189, 191).
- Review the strategic oversight and overall management of collaborative provision to ensure that procedures and practice take appropriate account of the precepts of *Section 2* of the *Code of practice* (Loughborough University, paragraphs 163, 164, 165, 166, 169, 170, 192).
- Ensure that all external examiners' reports are discussed by programme boards of study, including student representatives (Middlesex University, paragraph 26).
- 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).
- 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, paragraph 249).
- Review its current definition of collaborative provision, to encompass more accurately the range of activities which involve external providers (Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 182).
- 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 182).
- 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 69-71).
- 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).
- 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).
- 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).
- To review the policies, procedures and published information relating to the admission of postgraduate research students, to establish clarity of requirement (University of East Anglia, paragraph 145).
- Ensure that learning outcomes contained in programme specifications are, as the University expects, specific to each programme (University of Leeds, paragraphs 47, 50).
- 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).

- 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).
- That the University finds ways of ensuring that published information regarding college provision is clear and accurate, in order to allow students to make an informed choice at admission (University of Oxford, paragraph 221).
- Make explicit the formal responsibilities of different postholders for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of published information (University of Reading, paragraph 202).
- Monitor closely the consistency of programme handbooks with the guidance to be developed by a University working group, with particular emphasis on the clarity of information concerning assessment policies and regulations (University of Southampton, paragraph 135).
- Ensure consistency across all colleges in the application of its policy for the development of course handbooks, paying particular attention to information about placement learning (University of the Arts London, paragraph 155).

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, University of London
Lancaster University
Leeds Metropolitan University
Leeds Trinity University College
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/reviews.

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

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

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

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk