



# **Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2009-11**

## **Student engagement**

### **Third series**

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## **Preface**

One of the objectives of Institutional Audit is to 'contribute, in conjunction with other mechanisms and agencies in higher education, to the promotion and enhancement of quality in teaching, learning and assessment'. To support this objective, 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 Appendix C).

Two series of papers, covering audits that took place between 2003 and 2006, have already been published, 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. 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 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 that 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.

## Summary - Student engagement

This paper is based on the analysis of 59 Institutional Audit reports published between September 2009 and July 2011. The reports represent a wide sample of institutional types. The institutions were universal in involving their students in quality assurance and enhancement activity. In a few cases, this involvement was very limited, but the institutions concerned were idiosyncratic in their constitution or student body.

Most institutions are involving students in concerted and effective ways at senior levels, normally through the Students' Union or equivalent body, with whom they work hard at establishing a productive partnership. Formal deliberative committee arrangements are complemented by less formal means for Students' Union officers to interact with senior institutional personnel. The 20 features of good practice relating to student engagement were tempered by 26 related recommendations.

At operational levels, a rather more mixed picture of engagement emerges. At the disciplinary or subject level, students are often fully engaged through a variety of mechanisms. These usually relate to module or unit evaluations which contribute to annual monitoring. Students also have opportunities to feed back on wider institutional matters through staff-student liaison committees, or similar bodies. At the layer above that of the department, there is less widespread active engagement. At both levels, weakness is usually due to inconsistent application of policy, although there may be other factors applicable to poor faculty engagement.

Another range of operational involvement concerns student contributions to the processes of approval and periodic review of programmes. Particularly in the latter case, this may be from two perspectives. Students may either meet review panels or sit on them; the former is more common. A wide range of surveys were reported to be in use, either looking at specific aspects of provision, such as libraries, or more general 'student satisfaction surveys'. The use of external surveys was a noticeable ingredient of the feedback mix, with the National Student Survey (NSS) particularly well embedded across relevant institutions. There were a few indicators of concern that students may be subject to too many surveys, thus developing 'survey fatigue'. Institutions were also attempting to be more creative in seeking feedback, for example by using focus groups or employing online techniques. In as much as responding to students' feedback and communicating those responses depended upon the representational structures, the same weaknesses of inconsistency applied.

The cumulative evidence of the reports show that a culture of engagement with students is being further embedded. However, in setting up or sustaining appropriate systems, these must be made known to students and there must be appropriate training and development if this culture is to be sustained.

Sharing external examiner reports with students through their representatives is proving a problematic area in many cases, shown by the 22 recommendations that were made. Often these recommendations were prompted by weaknesses in the student representative systems upon which policy for sharing relied.

### Context

1 The outcomes of 59 Institutional Audits conducted by QAA on behalf of HEFCE, published between September 2009 and July 2011, form the basis for this review. Where institutions delivered awards in partnership with other bodies, such activity was also covered in the audit reports unless covered by separate collaborative provision reports. That was the case for two institutions,<sup>1</sup> and those reports are not included in this review. A brief description of the method used in analysing the reports in this and other *Outcomes Series 3* papers is provided in Appendix C. The reports considered are listed in Appendix D and cover a wide range of institutional types from the small and specialised through to the large civic. Also included are federal institutions that have specialised arrangements.<sup>2</sup>

2 Audits under review were undertaken using the *Handbook for Institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland* (2006, revised 2009).<sup>3</sup> The issue of student engagement was not one directly addressed by this process: there were no direct questions that audit teams had to answer, or for which institutions had to prepare evidence. However, paragraph 77 of the *Handbook for Institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland* contained the following:

The audit team will ensure that its programme for the audit visit includes meetings with students so that it can gain first-hand information on students' experience as learners and on their engagement with the institution's approach to quality assurance and enhancement.

It is 'engagement' in this sense with which this review deals. Consequently, the primary source of information in the technical annexes to the audit reports should come from the sections on quality assurance and enhancement.

3 Another key reference point for institutions and audits was the Academic Infrastructure,<sup>4</sup> a collective name for *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), the sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*) published by QAA, subject benchmark statements, and the *Guidelines for preparing programme specifications*. All elements had been in place for some years and while occasional updates occurred, there were no major changes influential upon the audits and institutions considered here.

4 During the latter part of the period under consideration, QAA were consulting upon a restructured and updated form of the Academic Infrastructure: the new UK Quality Code for Higher Education<sup>5</sup> (the Quality Code). While that has no direct bearing upon the audits reviewed here, Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality has a Chapter entitled *Chapter B5: Student engagement*. *Chapter B5* of the Quality Code helpfully defines the term 'student engagement' as covering two differing domains. The first is concerned with motivating students to engage in learning, but it is the second of the two definitions that guides this paper:

The participation of students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes, resulting in the improvement of their educational experience.

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<sup>1</sup> University of Derby, University of Westminster.

<sup>2</sup> University of London, University of London External System, Conservatoire of Dance and Drama

<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/InstitutionalAuditHandbook2009.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/InstitutionalAuditHandbook2009.pdf) (last accessed 29 August 2012).

<sup>4</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/AcademicInfrastructure/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/AcademicInfrastructure/Pages/default.aspx) (last accessed 29 August 2012).

<sup>5</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/default.aspx) (last accessed 29 August 2012). The Quality Code replaced the Academic infrastructure in the academic year 2012-13.

This can be seen as aligned to the earlier entry taken from the *Handbook*. *Chapter B5* of the Quality Code further provides a list of mechanisms by which students may be engaged:

- questionnaires; for example, at the end of a module or year
- student representative structures
- research activities; for example through focus groups
- student membership of committees
- student consultation events
- student involvement in new projects
- student dialogue with decision makers
- online discussion forums
- formal quality processes; for example periodic programme review.

5 All of the above topics are sometimes commented upon in the reports considered here. Consequently, mentions of these topics, where found within an individual audit report, have contributed to this review. *Chapter B5* also notes that external examiners' reports should be shared with the student body as a way of informing the conversation between the institution and its students. This is not a new requirement associated with the Quality Code, but was introduced as a result of a review of the national Quality Assurance Framework (HEFCE 2006/45).<sup>6</sup> Sharing external examiners' reports is a topic discussed more fully in *Chapter B7: External examining* of the Quality Code, which itself builds in part on the recommendations of the Universities UK/GuildHE review of external examining.<sup>7</sup> Audit reports considered here have commented upon the way in which institutions share external examiners' reports with students or their representatives, and the treatment of external examiners' reports in this regard is also covered in this paper. This topic has previously been covered in two of the Series 3 *Outcomes* papers: *Managing academic standards* and *External involvement in quality management*, covering the period 2007-09.

## Themes

6 Consideration of the reports reviewed for this paper, together with the relevant features of good practice and recommendations, led to the following themes being identified for discussion.

- Relationship between the institution and the student body.
- Hierarchy of representation:
  - institutional committees
  - mid-layer committees
  - subject level.
- Student representation system:
  - development and maintenance
  - student representative training
  - representation of research students
  - other modes of study.
- Role in approval, monitoring and review:
  - approval and periodic review

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<sup>6</sup> *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, Phase two outcomes*, HEFCE 2006/45; [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20081007160501/http://hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2006/06\\_45/](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20081007160501/http://hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2006/06_45/) (last accessed 29 August 2012).

<sup>7</sup> [www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/ReviewOfExternalExaminingArrangements.pdf](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/ReviewOfExternalExaminingArrangements.pdf) (last accessed 29 August 2012).

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- annual monitoring
- sharing of external examiners' reports.
- Other forms of feedback:
  - surveys
  - central service provision
  - alumni.
- Responding to student feedback.

## Relationship between the institution and the student body

7 As with the equivalent earlier report in this series, *Outcomes from Institutional audit 2007-09: Student engagement and support*<sup>8</sup> all audits were able to report upon the way in which students and their representative bodies contributed to the quality assurance of their educational provision. In many cases, it was clear that institutions were seeking to foster a positive partnership between themselves and the student body. Other reports indicated that active management is required in order to obtain full involvement of the student body if the opportunities offered for involvement are to be taken up in a sustained manner. Of the 15 institutions with features of good practice on student engagement, seven institutions had features of good practice that were directly relevant to relationships between the institution and the student body, mostly via their Students' Union (or equivalent).<sup>9</sup> There were no directly relevant recommendations.

8 The absence of a reported feature of good practice did not necessarily mean that there was not a good working relationship between students and their university. For example, in one institution, the Students' Union 'is seen as a "key partner" in monitoring and improving all aspects of the student experience'.<sup>10</sup> In another institution, an innovative scheme run jointly by the Staff Development Unit in partnership with the Students' Union facilitated the shadowing of students by senior managers, which the latter found to be a very positive experience, potentially contributing significantly to enhancement.<sup>11</sup> Through collaboration between the Students' Union and itself, another institution had 'revitalised the student representation system, significantly increasing students' ability to influence developments through programme boards'.<sup>12</sup> Other examples of effective collaboration between Students' Unions and universities are described below.

9 Most reports detailed systems by which students were represented within the quality assurance and enhancement systems via a range of committees at different organisational levels. These arrangements are covered in the subsequent sections of this paper. However, another indicator of the seriousness with which universities take the views of their students is the way in which they involve them in policy development or enhancement through what might be termed a project approach, or by support for specially funded posts.

10 An example of a project-based approach was indicated as a feature of good practice. This was a collaboration<sup>13</sup> between the university educational developers and the Students' Union, supporting joint staff/student teams in bids for resources to develop a specific aspect of learning and teaching. Among other positives, this had benefits for student

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<sup>8</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-from-audit-student-engagement.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-from-audit-student-engagement.aspx) (last accessed 29 August 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Ashridge, paragraph 82; Birmingham City University, paragraphs 75, 100, 120, 149; Buckinghamshire New University, paragraph 69; Oxford Brookes University, paragraphs 13, 79, 85 and 86; University of Derby, paragraph 96; University of Northumbria at Newcastle, paragraph 82; University of Teesside, paragraph 60.

<sup>10</sup> Buckinghamshire New University, paragraph 68.

<sup>11</sup> London South Bank University, paragraph 121.

<sup>12</sup> Royal Northern College of Music, paragraph 74.

<sup>13</sup> Birmingham City University, paragraphs 76 and 120.

employability. A second example was of student involvement in 'a major initiative designed to enhance learning opportunities by reviewing teaching, learning and assessment'.<sup>14</sup> One institution, working with its Students' Union, was funding a post of Representation and Democracy Coordinator, whose role was to bring about improvement in student participation in committees.<sup>15</sup> Another institution was funding a similar post, promoting student participation and providing training for programme representatives in all faculties, which was judged a feature of good practice by the audit team.<sup>16</sup> In another institution, the Students' Union was involved in the development of the Student Experience Strategy.<sup>17</sup>

11 Some reports directly referred to the ready access which students, usually through their Students' Union, had to Vice-Chancellors and other senior institutional staff. This could be through regular meetings between the Students' Union and university executives or other senior staff.<sup>18</sup> One institution also worked with its Students' Union to encourage direct communication between the student body and the Vice-Chancellor,<sup>19</sup> which contributed to a feature of good practice. Another route to improved liaison with senior staff was the formation of a formal committee such as a Student Affairs Committee, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and with the Students' Union President as Vice-Chair.<sup>20</sup> A similar arrangement was found at another institution where there was a Student Affairs Committee, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning and reporting to Senate.<sup>21</sup>

12 Where there were weaknesses apparent in relationships between institutions and their students, this was usually related to poor take-up of opportunities for representation within the committee structures and quality systems. These issues are dealt with under the relevant sections below. There were no recommendations directly concerning ineffective student/institution relationships as such. All but three reports mentioned the existence of a Students' Union or equivalent body and went on to outline their role in quality assurance and/or enhancement. Two of the exceptions were small specialist institutions. In one case, there was a single student representative on the Academic Board and no other institutional committee membership. While not making a recommendation, and acknowledging challenges presented by part-time students and the otherwise 'feedback hungry' nature of the institution, the audit team encouraged it 'to seek other ways of enabling students to contribute to relevant institutional-level committees'.<sup>22</sup> The other specialist institution was constituted from affiliated, but independent, schools. As such, its remit regarding quality assurance was idiosyncratic. However, while student membership of its academic committees was available, attendance by student representatives had been poor for some while. The institution was aware of this weakness, but the audit team felt it necessary to make a desirable recommendation that the institution 'implement measures to improve the effectiveness of student representation and participation in its committees'.<sup>23</sup> The final institution was another unusual constitutional arrangement of a School dedicated to distributed postgraduate study embedded within a federal structure. Students within this School had no access to a School Students' Union, but may have had access to unions in their home institutions.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> King's College London, paragraph 54.

<sup>15</sup> London South Bank University, paragraph 79.

<sup>16</sup> Liverpool John Moores University, paragraph 53.

<sup>17</sup> Birmingham City University, paragraph 75.

<sup>18</sup> University of Derby, paragraph 88; University of Newcastle, paragraph 61; University of Nottingham, paragraph 73; University of Teesside, paragraph 54.

<sup>19</sup> University of Derby, paragraph 88.

<sup>20</sup> University of Gloucestershire, paragraph 65.

<sup>21</sup> University of Nottingham, paragraph 88.

<sup>22</sup> Ashridge, paragraph 83.

<sup>23</sup> Conservatoire for Dance and Drama, paragraph 48.

<sup>24</sup> University of London, paragraph 25.



## **Hierarchy of representation**

13 Broadly speaking, institutions can normally be considered as having a tripartite hierarchy of committees. The highest academic level, the institutional or corporate level, goes under a variety of titles such as Senate or Academic Board, depending on institutional history. In traditional bicameral university structures, there is also a body, often called the Board of Governors or Council, which deals with temporal matters. Such high-level bodies have a layer of directly subsidiary committees with delegated powers or responsibility for oversight of, for example, course approval and amendment, or teaching quality.

14 Below this top-level strategic layer, there is an operational level directly concerned with educational provision for students. This operational level is also conventionally split into two layers. The lowest level, and that to which all students relate, operates at the subject or disciplinary level. This often correlates with departmental-level activity. Most institutions also have an intermediate or mid-layer of operational structure where departments are grouped into cognate disciplines. This mid-layer is commonly known as the faculty or school level. The detailed functions of this mid-layer vary between institutions, but often include quality assurance matters. Nomenclature at these operational levels is not standardised, but the principle of two operational levels applies to most institutions covered in this review.

## **Institutional committees**

15 This sample of English universities demonstrates a clear commitment to hearing the student voice through student representation at the highest institutional level. A considerable majority of reports are explicit about student representation on an institution's senior academic body, the Senate or Academic Board. Those reports that are not use phrases such as 'at institutional level all appropriate deliberative committees have student membership'<sup>25</sup> or 'students are represented by the Guild of Students on all appropriate institutional-level committees'.<sup>26</sup> It is reasonable to suppose that those institutions too have student representation on Senate or Academic Board. Again, a clear majority of reports are explicit that such high-level representation is via officers of the student representative body, rather than individually appointed or elected students. The exceptions to this pattern are institutions that have atypical governance, atypical constitutional structures, or are small and/or specialised.<sup>27</sup> There were three features of good practice that could be considered as reflecting upon this upper tier of representation and five recommendations where weakness in institutional representation made a contribution. Non-academic senior bodies upon which there is reported student representation or input includes the Boards of Governors<sup>28</sup> and Council.<sup>29</sup>

16 In one institution, the partnership approach to the Students' Union has led to 'effective representation at all levels of the University's committee structure'; students are 'well represented on all of the University's committees' and students are increasingly involved in 'many aspects of the institution's work including its approaches to enhancement'.<sup>30</sup> This involvement was contributory to an overall feature of good practice relating to the relationship between the institution and the Students' Union.

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<sup>25</sup> London Metropolitan University, paragraph 37.

<sup>26</sup> University College Birmingham, paragraph 33.

<sup>27</sup> Ashridge, London School of Economics, The College of Law, University of London.

<sup>28</sup> Birmingham City University, paragraph 75; Oxford Brookes University, paragraph 13; University of Bolton, paragraph 72; University of East London, paragraph 35; University of Teesside, paragraph 56; University of Worcester, paragraph 70.

<sup>29</sup> Brunel University, paragraph 90; Imperial College London, paragraph 62; University of Huddersfield, paragraph 70; University of Ulster, paragraph 87.

<sup>30</sup> Buckinghamshire New University, paragraphs 68 and 115.

17 In another institution, a close working relationship with the Students' Union, developed in response to a recommendation from a previous audit, was also a key factor in effective student representation at a high level. These developments had 'led to regular student input at Board of Governors and senior management levels'. All groups that discuss student matters must have student members as a matter of policy and at the time of the audit, representation was about to be extended to the Executive Board. As well as the extent of high-level student representation, this institution also had a close relationship between the Students' Union and a responsible senior manager, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience). Furthermore, a senior-level committee directly subordinate to the Academic Board had responsibility for monitoring student representation on committees. The collective impact of these and other initiatives had led to the audit team to declare a feature of good practice to be 'the close working relationship between the University and the Students' Union in enhancing student representation at a variety of levels within the institution'.<sup>31</sup>

18 A similar pattern of partnership working emerged at the third institution with a relevant feature of good practice. As with the earlier institution, identified weakness in previous arrangements had led to enhancement. Beyond student representation 'at all deliberative levels of the institution, with sabbatical officers sitting on institutional-level committees', students themselves 'felt they were consulted on changes and that students were always represented on key University task groups'. Another feature of the institution was the way in which students had been integrated into the strategic approach to quality enhancement through a variety of activities.<sup>32</sup>

19 Weaknesses contributing to recommendations in this general area stem from a variety of causes. For example, one institution 'relies heavily on one sabbatical post, that of Students' Union President'.<sup>33</sup> At another institution, the lack of formal student membership on a key institutional committee contributed to a recommendation that it 'provide a full and consistent level of student representation in all its deliberative academic committees'.<sup>34</sup> Another institution, while 'ensuring that students had many accessible ways to provide feedback', had problems with student representation: '... institutional level student representation is more problematic and participation by student representatives, other than sabbaticals of the Students' Union, is variable, with some vacancies standing empty for a number of years'. In this case, a contributory factor - lack of action on the part of the Students' Union - was acknowledged by students themselves. The student written submission noted the Students' Union and institution working more closely on improving the student voice.<sup>35</sup> Another institution was building upon the outcomes of a review of governance, having identified a number of matters of concern. One result was that institutional committees now had student membership; however, the institution itself recognised that take-up of such opportunities had been poor. For example, in the year prior to the audit, of the six student members, 'none of the student representative positions on [a senior quality committee] were filled'.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the institution was aware of this issue and was now working more closely with its Students' Union such that that working relationship had given rise to a feature of good practice.<sup>37</sup> The final institution with an associated recommendation was federal in nature, at which level students 'have little or no involvement in quality management'. The audit team thought that the University 'may wish to keep under review' this unusual arrangement.<sup>38</sup> However, the associated report recommendation was related to the embedded School for whose standards the federal

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<sup>31</sup> Oxford Brookes University, paragraphs 13, 84 and 86.

<sup>32</sup> University of Northumbria at Newcastle, paragraphs 76, 81, 82 and 139.

<sup>33</sup> Courtauld Institute for Art, paragraph 53.

<sup>34</sup> Imperial College London, paragraph 67.

<sup>35</sup> London South Bank University, paragraphs 77 and 79.

<sup>36</sup> University of Derby, paragraphs 87 and 90.

<sup>37</sup> University of Derby, paragraph 88.

<sup>38</sup> University of London, paragraph 35.

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institution was directly responsible. In the case of the latter, while there were student representatives on School-level committees, they were both untrained and unsupported by a Students' Union.<sup>39</sup>

### Mid-layer committees

20 Many reports mentioned student representation matters at the operational layer between the institution and the discipline, although there were few direct features of good practice or recommendations. The latter outweighed the former by four to two. In some cases not involving features of good practice, positive features such as representational opportunities on faculty-level committees were balanced against the difficulties of obtaining active participation on the part of students in practice. Overall, a mixed picture of success emerges from those reports that deal with matters related to mid-layer representation.

21 In one institution with a relevant feature of good practice, the good working relationship between the University and the Students' Union, cited earlier, had given rise to a range of enhancements connected with student representation, the report specifically mentioning this intermediate tier, with the Students' Union working with schools to recruit, train and brief student representatives.<sup>40</sup> It was a similar partnership approach that led another institution to have representation at all levels to be highlighted as a feature of good practice. More specifically in this case, the quality system required representation that was monitored by assistant deans.<sup>41</sup> Where active student representation at faculty level has been achieved, it is not necessarily easy to sustain. In one institution where student representatives were noted as being particularly active at faculty level, the Students' Union had found 'recruiting, training ..., and monitoring the system challenging'.<sup>42</sup>

22 In another case, an institution had a partnership approach to working with its students and had effective representation at senior and subject-levels; however, they still had issues at faculty-level and were trialling a variety of approaches to solving the difficulty.<sup>43</sup> The difficulty of fully engaging students at faculty-level was illustrated in an institution where, despite student business appearing as an agenda item, 'the team found several instances in which nothing came up under that heading because no representative was present'.<sup>44</sup>

Matters that resulted in recommendations included no student representation at faculty level<sup>45</sup> or, where the right of student representation was comprehensive, poor take-up.<sup>46</sup> A similar picture emerged at another institution where inconsistencies and difficulties in identification, recruiting and training of student representatives led to under-representation and lack of clarity among students about who their representative was.<sup>47</sup>

### Subject level

23 This is the level at which student engagement potentially has the most direct impact upon educational provision. Varied institutional structures, processes and nomenclature, together with differing levels of detail in audit reporting, make analysis and comparison of reports difficult. One of the reports considered here indicates no student representation at

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<sup>39</sup> University of London, paragraph 37.

<sup>40</sup> Oxford Brookes University, paragraphs 13 and 79.

<sup>41</sup> University of Teesside, paragraph 59 and 60.

<sup>42</sup> University of Cumbria, paragraph 69.

<sup>43</sup> Birmingham City University, paragraph 73.

<sup>44</sup> Manchester Metropolitan University, paragraphs 75 and 76.

<sup>45</sup> University College Plymouth, St. Mark & St. John, paragraph 37, Birkbeck College London, paragraph 60.

<sup>46</sup> University of Derby, paragraph 87.

<sup>47</sup> University of Plymouth, paragraphs 75 and 76.

this level<sup>48</sup> and another is simply not explicit.<sup>49</sup> All the rest indicate some degree of subject-level engagement by students. There are no features of good practice that pick out subject level representation explicitly; one directly relevant recommendation and two further recommendations can be considered relevant.

24 Student representation at this level varies in the degree of formality offered. In some cases, there is student membership of programme or course committees that are a part of the deliberative structure. Therefore, in one case, auditors found elected representatives on all taught programme course committees and were able to confirm 'the centrality of students in such committees, and found evidence of representatives contributing to developments in quality management'.<sup>50</sup> Another institution regarded 'the Programme Committee as the main forum for student engagement'. In this case, many programmes also had 'a second, less formal committee or forum for staff-student liaison'.<sup>51</sup> The audit team was able to confirm the active involvement of students in these bodies. This case simultaneously illustrates two features; one is the variability of structure that may exist in one institution, and the other is that there can be committees outside the formal deliberative structures that have an important role in student engagement. In the case of a small, specialised institution, the less formal Staff Student Liaison Committee operated across the whole of the academic provision, but included at least one student from each programme.<sup>52</sup> It is not always possible to infer the degree of formality involved with a body just from its name, as in 'staff-student liaison committee'. One institution employed such committees as the students' formal departmental route for contributing to quality assurance, the committees having a wide remit.<sup>53</sup>

25 It was the matter of no formal standing, in the sense of being part of the deliberative structure, of a Staff Student Liaison Committee that led to the single recommendation relevant to this section. This was a School-wide body within a specialised institution, chaired by the principal and encompassing an extensive range of matters. The auditors thought it desirable that 'the School establish clear reporting lines to a higher institutional level' for the committee.<sup>54</sup> The two other related recommendations reflected systems where the right of student representation on suitable bodies had been established, but the active involvement of students was yet to be consistently achieved.<sup>55</sup> While not leading to recommendations, the lack of consistency in application of student representation systems, leading to poor attendance, under-representation or other matters leading to ineffectiveness, was noted in many reports.

## Student representation system

26 One aspect of student representation systems is the structural one relating to what bodies and under what circumstances students will have representative rights. Another aspect is the support that underpins the representatives, both from the institution and the Students' Union. It is also necessary for a system to be clear about the way in which various sub-groups within the student body are to be incorporated. This section deals with those issues as reflected in the sample of reports considered.

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<sup>48</sup> Ashridge.

<sup>49</sup> University of Manchester.

<sup>50</sup> London Metropolitan University, paragraph 34.

<sup>51</sup> Manchester Metropolitan University, paragraphs 75 and 76.

<sup>52</sup> Heythrop College, University of London, paragraph 20.

<sup>53</sup> London School of Economics and Political Science, paragraph 46.

<sup>54</sup> Guildhall School of Music & Drama, paragraph 35.

<sup>55</sup> University of Derby, paragraph 90; University of Plymouth, paragraph 76.

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### Development and maintenance

27 It is clear from some reports that putting in place a range of opportunities for student representation is insufficient in itself to ensure an effective system. Even where an institution and the Students' Union work in partnership, there can be difficulties, as mentioned above.

28 A few reports noted that the audit was seeing a system that had been developed in response to a significant re-development of the representative system, sometimes prompted by the current or an earlier audit. Thus one institution where the audit found good representation on boards of studies had established a review group the previous year, chaired by the Students' Union President, 'to review student representation on those boards, the aim being to enhance student engagement'. Subsequent to production of the student written submission, the remit of the group was broadened. Furthermore, a Student Representatives Coordinating Group oversaw the student representation process.<sup>56</sup> This activity contributed to a feature of good practice. After a 2005 audit, another institution had established a Governance review, one result of which was the right to comprehensive student representation at all institutional levels. However, while there was a close partnership between the institution and the Students' Union, such that it was a feature of good practice, difficulties with appointing active representatives still existed and led to a recommendation to 'take further steps to increase the effective participation of students at all levels of the deliberative structure'.<sup>57</sup> In the year prior to audit, another institution had undertaken a comprehensive review of the student representation system, introducing changes intended to enhance student involvement. These included a Student Affairs Committee and a range of representational opportunities, including faculty Staff Student Liaison Committees.<sup>58</sup> A further institution had undertaken an internal thematic audit in the year prior to Institutional Audit in order to standardise the approach to student representation. This involved the Students' Union in supporting and monitoring the representatives and the initiative had worked so well that it was noted as a feature of good practice.<sup>59</sup>

29 Obtaining active student take-up of representational opportunities has been referred to as a difficulty in several of the preceding sections. A few reports described staff posts intended to address this problem,<sup>60</sup> although such posts do not always produce immediate results.<sup>61</sup> Other initiatives included: Student Representatives Awards, allocated in recognition of the achievements of student representatives;<sup>62</sup> payment of student representatives,<sup>63</sup> including, for the first time, a paid full-time sabbatical post for the Students' Union president;<sup>64</sup> and introducing a credit-bearing module on 'Enhancing Employability through Class Representation'.<sup>65</sup>

30 Communication between students and their representatives was also raised as a matter of concern in a few reports. In one institution, there was a lack of dialogue between students and their representatives, or between representatives operating at different levels.<sup>66</sup> In another case, students were unaware of the identity of their representatives, but the

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<sup>56</sup> Birmingham City University, paragraph 74.

<sup>57</sup> University of Derby, paragraphs 88 and 90.

<sup>58</sup> University of Gloucestershire, paragraph 65.

<sup>59</sup> University of Worcester, paragraphs 70 to 74.

<sup>60</sup> Liverpool John Moores University, paragraph 53; London South Bank University, paragraph 78; Birmingham City University, paragraph 73; University of Derby, paragraph 88, University of Cumbria; paragraph 68; University of Gloucestershire, paragraph 62.

<sup>61</sup> University of Ulster, paragraph 89.

<sup>62</sup> Birmingham City University, paragraph 73.

<sup>63</sup> Birmingham City University, paragraph 120; University of Northumbria at Newcastle, paragraph 77.

<sup>64</sup> Heythrop College, London, paragraph 79.

<sup>65</sup> University of Ulster, paragraph 89.

<sup>66</sup> University of Bolton, paragraph 74; University of Manchester, paragraph 52.

institution was discussing improvements to this situation.<sup>67</sup> In a third case, the problem was some representatives themselves not engaging with their constituencies, with the Students' Union and institution working together to remedy the problem.<sup>68</sup> A similar position was obtained at a fourth institution.<sup>69</sup> Conversely, two institutions helped representatives in communicating with their constituencies by providing email lists.<sup>70</sup>

31 This paper concentrates on the formal mechanism for students to engage with their institution; however, a substantial number of reports commented upon informal mechanisms. In some cases, informality was facilitated by the institution's small size,<sup>71</sup> but this was not necessarily so.<sup>72</sup> Audit teams were able to use this evidence of the informal supplementing the formal to help decide the overall adequacy of student representation arrangements.<sup>73</sup>

### Student representative training

32 A significant component of support for student representatives is the preparation they receive for their role, and training was discussed to some extent in most reports reviewed here. Training was normally devolved to the Students' Union, or the Students' Union in conjunction with the institution. Training itself was not a direct factor in any features of good practice, but the lack of it did contribute to four recommendations.

33 Few reports go into much detail regarding the training provided. One Students' Union provided both basic and advanced training. Training could also be topped up and there were additional web-based resources.<sup>74</sup> This institution also provided pre-meeting briefings for representatives on high-level committees. Similar briefings supplementing training were one of a number of developments regarded positively at another institution.<sup>75</sup> Another institution with comprehensive training produced handbooks for representatives tailored to each school.<sup>76</sup> Online training was reported as being useful to off-campus students.<sup>77</sup> In the view of representatives themselves, apparently comprehensive training still may not prepare students adequately for meetings.<sup>78</sup> The availability of training does not necessarily mean that it is systematically taken up,<sup>79</sup> however, when lists of trainees are kept, then a route exists for the Students' Union to monitor the extent of take-up and encourage attendance from the untrained.<sup>80</sup>

34 Particular weaknesses leading to recommendations included an institution where its code of practice was apparently not functioning, in that representatives should have been referred to the Students' Union for training, but no students met by the team were aware of such training.<sup>81</sup> A specialist institution did not currently have training, which it recognised would address weaknesses in the representative system, but intended to introduce it.<sup>82</sup> A third institution was urged to provide formal training to increase the effectiveness of

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<sup>67</sup> University of Huddersfield, paragraph 73.

<sup>68</sup> Guildhall School of Music and Drama, paragraph 35.

<sup>69</sup> University of East London.

<sup>70</sup> Imperial College London; Oxford Brookes University, paragraph 79.

<sup>71</sup> Harper Adams University College, paragraph 56; Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln paragraph 60; Heythrop College, University of London, paragraph 83.

<sup>72</sup> Queen Mary, University of London, paragraph 65; University of West London paragraph 40.

<sup>73</sup> Cranfield University, paragraphs 63 and 65.

<sup>74</sup> Brunel University, paragraph 91.

<sup>75</sup> Royal Northern College of Music, paragraph 43.

<sup>76</sup> Oxford Brookes University, paragraph 79.

<sup>77</sup> Canterbury Christ Church University, paragraph 90; University of Northumbria at Newcastle, paragraph 78.

<sup>78</sup> Buckinghamshire New University, paragraph 74.

<sup>79</sup> Guildhall School of Music and Drama, paragraph 35; York St. John University, paragraph 47.

<sup>80</sup> Kingston University, paragraph 62; University of Northumbria at Newcastle, paragraph 78.

<sup>81</sup> Birkbeck College London, paragraph 60.

<sup>82</sup> Conservatoire for Dance and Drama, paragraphs 47 and 48.

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representatives.<sup>83</sup> Finally, an institution that had a mixed picture concerning the effectiveness of its representation system was advised 'to review its strategies for recruitment and training of student representatives to ensure that students are enabled to engage fully with institutional and faculty-level deliberative structures'.<sup>84</sup>

### Other modes of study

35 Another identifiable group of students are those who do not study on-campus; primarily these are distance learners and those learning in the context of collaborative provision arrangements, although there are those in various forms of work-based learning also to consider. For these groups, educational provision has distinct characteristics, the consideration of which should be feeding into institutional representational processes. Institutional management of collaborative provision as a separate topic will be covered by another paper in this series, but there are some points worth making within the current context. A large majority of the reports considered in this paper reported upon the existence of collaborative provision, which was sometimes wide-scale. A smaller majority reported upon distance learning. This is a potentially complex area as the two modes of delivery may overlap to varying degrees. What is surprising is how few reports directly considered student engagement for students studying in either mode; notwithstanding the opportunities students may have for representation within collaborating institutions, and other indirect forms of feedback such as link tutor visits. In connection with the student role in quality assurance, no reports reviewed here mentioned work-based learners.

36 Within the context of the student's role in quality assurance, only two reports mention learners at a distance. In one case, the report noted the challenge faced by the institution in capturing full representation of widely dispersed students. The institution was trying to hear the student voice by using the virtual learning environment and paying expenses to UK-based students. However, 'it was clear to the audit team that the full range of international students still needs to be engaged'.<sup>85</sup> Another institution had also gone down the virtual route to enable distance-learning students to participate in quality assurance processes - as well as via representatives, this could also be as an entire cohort.<sup>86</sup> A further report noted under 'Other Modes of Study' that an institutional working group had been set up to address the issue of the voice of 'non-campus students' with one faculty using an electronic facility.<sup>87</sup> A fourth report, in connection with student participation, remarked that 'the team found a range of different practices in operation, including imaginative solutions to the challenge posed by distance learning', but did not elaborate further.<sup>88</sup>

37 When collaboration is with UK partners, it is sometimes easier to overcome some of the disadvantages of geography. At one institution, the Students' Union was responsible for training representatives in local partners. The institution wished to work more closely with partners, but stated 'resources are not currently available to engage with students from partner organisations to any significant extent'.<sup>89</sup> A second institution also gave a lack of resource as a reason for its Students' Union not to engage significantly with collaborative provision students.<sup>90</sup> A related example is of an institution that acknowledged 'the need to review the training and support of student representatives for collaborative programmes'.<sup>91</sup> At another institution, the team, in response to inconsistent staff-student consultative

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<sup>83</sup> Courtauld Institute for Art, paragraph 56.

<sup>84</sup> London South Bank University, paragraph 79.

<sup>85</sup> University of London International Programmes, paragraph 106.

<sup>86</sup> Oxford Brookes University, paragraph 77.

<sup>87</sup> The Manchester Metropolitan University, paragraph 86.

<sup>88</sup> Staffordshire University, paragraph 147.

<sup>89</sup> Kingston University, paragraphs 62 and 64.

<sup>90</sup> University of Northumbria at Newcastle, paragraph 79.

<sup>91</sup> University of Cumbria, paragraph 69.

committee policy and practice, recommended 'that it would be desirable for a single institutional policy for student-staff consultative committees to be consistently applied across the University College, including for collaborative provision', but the phrase about collaborative provision was not included in the associated formal recommendation.<sup>92</sup>

38 Some reports include a separate subsection on the role of students in quality assurance in collaborative provision; however, mention of student engagement in these sections is very limited.

### Role in approval, monitoring and review

39 Beyond the representative system operating via committees, working groups and other forums, students may be offered another route to engagement, and this is through involvement in programme approval, monitoring and review processes. This may be either as a consequence of student committee membership; that is, by being on panels undertaking such activities, or through meeting the panels to provide evidence. There were no features of good practice explicitly related to this area of institutional activity, but there were two recommendations.

### Approval and periodic review

40 A few reports describe active involvement of students in course approval. Of those that do, this is often through representation on quality assurance committees that can affect approval decisions.<sup>93</sup> There may be a formal direct role, for example through commenting upon handbooks,<sup>94</sup> or advance consultation with staff-student liaison committees.<sup>95</sup> A few institutions had student members on approval panels,<sup>96</sup> but this was not always successful and one institution had ceased the practice after a trial, but the report does not state why.<sup>97</sup> As periodic review or re-validation processes tend to be very similar to those used for initial approval, student involvement is also similar. However, a few reports noted an extra opportunity for engagement through meetings between students and review panels.<sup>98</sup>

### Annual monitoring

41 A substantial number of reports consider the student role in annual monitoring. As with periodic review, this may be through membership of committees that comment on annual monitoring reports.<sup>99</sup> In other cases, student contribution is by way of input via staff student liaison committees, module evaluations or questionnaires.<sup>100</sup> In some cases, an institution's expectations in this regard are thwarted by virtue of inconsistent or variable practice across departments or faculties. In one case, this was due to permitted freedom for

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<sup>92</sup> Newman University College, paragraph 95.

<sup>93</sup> Buckinghamshire New University, paragraph 70; Harper Adams University College, paragraph 54; London School of Economics, paragraph 45; Norwich University College of the Arts, paragraph 75.

<sup>94</sup> Buckinghamshire New University, paragraph 70.

<sup>95</sup> London School of Economics, paragraph 46.

<sup>96</sup> Imperial College London, paragraph 62; Norwich University College of the Arts, paragraph 75; University of Bolton, paragraph 78; University of West London, paragraph 41; York St. John University, paragraph 24.

<sup>97</sup> Buckinghamshire New University, paragraph 70.

<sup>98</sup> Canterbury Christ Church University, paragraph 89; Harper Adams University College, paragraph 55; Manchester Metropolitan University, paragraph 77; Norwich University College of the Arts, paragraph 75; University of Ulster, paragraph 41; University of Westminster, paragraph 73.

<sup>99</sup> Birmingham City University, paragraph 74; Buckinghamshire New University, paragraph 71; Harper Adams University College, paragraph 54; St. George's Hospital Medical School, paragraph 88; University of Plymouth, paragraph 74; University of Westminster, paragraph 72.

<sup>100</sup> Brunel University, paragraph 92; College of Law, paragraph 63; Newman University College' paragraph 89; University of Chester, paragraph 78; University of West London, paragraph 41; Writtle College, paragraph 71.



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faculties leaving the role of students open to interpretation.<sup>101</sup> Another institution's plans to standardise student programme-level representation had 'not yet been detailed sufficiently in relation to how programme representatives might contribute to the preparation and consideration of annual monitoring reports', and this contributed to a recommendation concerning the fitness for purpose of processes to enable students to contribute to programme development.<sup>102</sup> A further contributory factor was that module evaluations were normally kept confidential. Inconsistency in a variety of matters connected with annual monitoring, including a lack of module-level annual monitoring that was supposed to include module questionnaires, led to a further recommendation at another institution.<sup>103</sup>

### Sharing of external examiners' reports

42 In order to contribute knowledgeably about the quality of their educational experience, a valuable input to student understanding is the reports of their external examiners. By the time that the audits being considered here were undertaken, institutions had had three years to respond to the requirements of HEFCE 2006/45 - 'prepare to share external examiners' reports as a matter of course with the institution's student representatives, for example through staff-student committees'. At the time of the audits, guidance to audit teams was that QAA expected full, unabridged (except for excision of personal data) copies of external examiners' reports to be made available to student representatives, and most audit reports include comments on this aspect of institutional responsibility. There were no features of good practice associated directly with sharing external examiners' reports. There were, however, nearly a third of institution's audit reports that included recommendations concerning inadequacies in sharing external examiners' reports.

43 In responding to the HEFCE 2006/45 circular, the approach adopted by many institutions was that with student representation on the committees that considered external examiners' reports and/or with staff-student liaison committees already established, little was needed to address the requirement further. This response relied upon a robust and effective representative system, which, as has been described above, did not always exist. Where such a system did exist, teams were able to report quite simply, for example 'that boards of studies have good student representation and that module evaluations, surveys, annual monitoring reports and external examiner reports were discussed',<sup>104</sup> or that student representatives 'are able to contribute to discussion on a wide range of issues, including external examiner reports'.<sup>105</sup> Another approach was for School Learning and Teaching committees to consider external examiners' reports, ensuring appropriate responses'. These are then made available to the school or programme student representatives'.<sup>106</sup> Another example of a similar process employed electronic postings of external examiners' reports and responses 'for access by relevant staff and students'.<sup>107</sup> For the same institution, auditors were able to write 'external examiners' reports are effectively shared with partner institutions and with students...'.<sup>108</sup> In one institution, student representatives were involved, via course committees, in deciding the action taken in response to external examiners' reports.<sup>109</sup>

44 Where there were matters of concern to the degree that teams felt a formal recommendation was required regarding the sharing of external examiners' reports, a

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<sup>101</sup> Canterbury Christ Church University, paragraph 88.

<sup>102</sup> Heythrop College, London, paragraph 80.

<sup>103</sup> Guildhall School of Music & Drama, paragraphs 14 and 15.

<sup>104</sup> Birmingham City University, paragraph 74.

<sup>105</sup> Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, paragraph 89.

<sup>106</sup> The University of Northumbria at Newcastle, paragraph 40.

<sup>107</sup> Oxford Brookes University, paragraph 41.

<sup>108</sup> Oxford Brookes University, paragraph 153.

<sup>109</sup> Harper Adams University College, paragraph 54.

common theme was inconsistency of practice or the need for a more systematic approach. This could arise through weak implementation of policy,<sup>110</sup> absence of clear policy,<sup>111</sup> or through the provision of summaries only.<sup>112</sup> A few reports also extended their recommendations to students in collaborative partners.<sup>113</sup>

### Other forms of feedback

45 Beyond the means of engaging students already covered so far, the reports mention a variety of other ways by which students can engage with their institutions and feed back their views. Often this is in the section on *Management information - feedback from students* and mostly they cover a range of survey types. Perhaps expectedly, little detail is provided, and reports concentrate on the use made of the data returned. There were two directly relevant features of good practice, but there were four recommendations relevant to the use of surveys.

46 Other than surveys, other forms of feedback noted were students participating in focus groups,<sup>114</sup> perhaps run by trained staff,<sup>115</sup> or direct meetings with staff.<sup>116</sup> For part-time students, one institution supplemented questionnaires with email, the virtual learning environment and whole-class meetings.<sup>117</sup> One institution had found the use of focus groups so successful that it intended to 'adopt a more strategic approach to internal student opinion surveys, with both focus groups and internal surveys focusing on specific aspects of the student experience.'<sup>118</sup>

### Surveys

47 All but one of the reports for institutions where it was applicable did not make a clear mention of the use made of the National Student Survey (NSS), however, even that lone report did mention the use of 'national surveys'.<sup>119</sup> It is clear that institutions generally take the results of the NSS seriously, with consideration at the highest levels. Typically, results are evaluated centrally and analyses presented to senior committees<sup>120</sup> and/or role holders.<sup>121</sup> Other actions reported are for departments or faculties to be asked to respond,<sup>122</sup> particularly in cases of concern,<sup>123</sup> or consideration of NSS results is included as part of annual monitoring.<sup>124</sup> Institutions also respond to the NSS by establishing specific working groups<sup>125</sup> or undertaking projects to address lower-scoring areas.<sup>126</sup> The NSS was also used

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<sup>110</sup> Buckinghamshire New University, paragraph 44; University of Cumbria, paragraphs 30 and 132; University of Derby, paragraph 89; Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, paragraph 43; Liverpool John Moores University, paragraph 51; Newman University College, Birmingham, paragraphs 87 and 163; Staffordshire University, paragraphs 48 and 142; University of London, paragraphs 36 and 74 University of Nottingham, paragraph 162; York St. John University, paragraphs 18 and 92.

<sup>111</sup> Cranfield University, paragraph 37; Heythrop College, University of London, paragraph 50; University of Manchester, paragraphs 32 and 89; University of Westminster, paragraph 46.

<sup>112</sup> London Metropolitan University, paragraph 18.

<sup>113</sup> Newman University College, Birmingham, paragraph 163; Staffordshire University, paragraph 142; University of Cumbria, paragraph 132; University of Manchester, paragraph 89.

<sup>114</sup> Staffordshire University, paragraph 72, The College of Law, paragraph 67.

<sup>115</sup> Liverpool John Moores University, paragraph 45.

<sup>116</sup> Oxford Brookes University, paragraph 76.

<sup>117</sup> University of Ulster, paragraph 81.

<sup>118</sup> University of Newcastle upon Tyne, paragraph 58.

<sup>119</sup> York St. John University.

<sup>120</sup> University of Derby, paragraph 84.

<sup>121</sup> Canterbury Christ Church University, paragraph 80; University of Huddersfield, paragraph 77.

<sup>122</sup> University of Derby, paragraph 84; Liverpool John Moores University, paragraph 47.

<sup>123</sup> Birkbeck College, paragraph 59.

<sup>124</sup> University of Huddersfield, paragraph 66; University of Nottingham, paragraph 32.

<sup>125</sup> King's College London, paragraph 51; The Manchester Metropolitan University, paragraph 71.

<sup>126</sup> Royal Northern College of Music, paragraph 40.

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as a basis for internal surveys when information was required for other than final year students<sup>127</sup> or simply replicated with other year groups.<sup>128</sup> Approximately 15 per cent of reports also mentioned the use of the Higher Education Academy Postgraduate Research or Postgraduate Taught Experience Surveys in much the same way as the NSS. A similar number of reports mentioned the International Student Barometer as informing institutions of their students' views.

48 These external surveys were in many cases supplemented by internal surveys of student satisfaction. In their connection, as well as for the external surveys, a difficulty was noted that could apply to all survey types; low response rates reducing their significance. For example, a 'College has acknowledged that the response rate to this survey has been disappointing despite a recent small improvement in the rate of return'<sup>129</sup> and in another report, 'the University noted a poor response rate in the current surveys'.<sup>130</sup> It is not just on-campus students for whom response rates may be an issue. In one report, the audit team encouraged the institution 'to consider how it might increase response rates to improve further its understanding of the experience of students undertaking collaborative programmes'.<sup>131</sup> In a similar case, the response rate was only 5 percent.<sup>132</sup> At another institution, in connection with unit evaluation questionnaire results, it was reported that 'the value of this data is limited by low response rates in various areas'.<sup>133</sup> The team advised the institution to 'implement measures designed to achieve greater response rates to internal student surveys'.<sup>134</sup> One clue to the issue of low response rates may be found in the few reports that either mentioned concerns about 'survey fatigue', raised by students, the institution or by the audit team itself.<sup>135</sup> No reports that reported upon the difficulty of getting significant survey returns provide solutions to tackle this problem.

49 As well as annual questionnaires to students in different years, questionnaires were used at the end of semesters, the end of courses and the middle and end of modules or units, or to address specific areas of provision such as central services or disability support. One report raised the issue of standardising questionnaires, noting 'as the format of such questionnaires varies both between and within schools, comparison of provision across programmes is not readily enabled, so the value of the feedback beyond the module or subject is reduced'.<sup>136</sup> This problem was also reported at another institution that was advised to 'ensure the systematic collection, analysis, dissemination and utilisation of student data and feedback'.<sup>137</sup> A few institutions addressed this issue by setting out core questions for faculty or departmentally administered surveys, with the potential for local additions.<sup>138</sup> Another institution was still working on the format of programme and module questionnaires following a recommendation from the previous audit. The team advised 'that the School establishes formal and systematic module-level monitoring as a requirement in annual programme evaluation'.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Brunel University, paragraph 86; University of Gloucestershire, paragraph 59; Edge Hill, paragraph 69.

<sup>128</sup> Norwich University College of the Arts, paragraph 69.

<sup>129</sup> Writtle College, paragraph 66.

<sup>130</sup> Kingston University, paragraph 146.

<sup>131</sup> St. George's Hospital Medical School, paragraph 152.

<sup>132</sup> University of West London, paragraph 77.

<sup>133</sup> University of Manchester, paragraph 42.

<sup>134</sup> University of Manchester, paragraphs 50 and 73.

<sup>135</sup> Canterbury Christ Church University, paragraph 78; University of Chester, paragraph 141; Liverpool John Moores University, paragraph 45; University of Newcastle upon Tyne, paragraph 55; Kingston University, paragraph 146; University College Plymouth St. Mark and St. John, paragraph 53.

<sup>136</sup> Brunel University, paragraph 82.

<sup>137</sup> King's College London, paragraph 50.

<sup>138</sup> University of Chester, paragraph 74; University of Newcastle, paragraph 53; The University of Northumbria at Newcastle, paragraph 69; University of Cumbria, paragraph 61; Royal Holloway, paragraph 48; St. George's Hospital Medical School, paragraph 84; York St. John University, paragraph 45.

<sup>139</sup> Guildhall School of Music & Drama, paragraph 15.

## Central service provision

50 'Central service provision' in this context means library, information technology, careers service, and so on. Beyond the opportunities to comment upon matters of central service provision offered through student representation on the academically based committee structures or through the general satisfaction surveys, there are other ways in which students may feed back their views on service provision. In one institution, there were students 'on the user groups that advise on the strategic development of learning resources - library, IT and e-learning - and on the various working groups set up to review and improve the student experience'. The working groups consisted of a mixture of academic staff, students, Students' Union officers and central services staff and were the 'stimulus for significant improvements to the student experience'. The team identified as a feature of good practice 'the use of student experience working groups, following student-led agendas, to review and enhance the student experience'.<sup>140</sup> Another institution had recently established a Students' Union/Services Forum 'as a way of improving communication between the student body and the various service departments' that students praised for its effectiveness.<sup>141</sup> A similar group had been established at a further institution, a specific Student-Staff Liaison Group with a remit to cover services and facilities and with 'a clear reporting line into the Senior Management Committee'.<sup>142</sup>

51 However, it is clear that many institutions continue to employ surveys dedicated to eliciting student opinion about services such as IT and the library, with a third of reports alluding to such surveys. However, there is generally little detailed comment. In connection with one library service that made use of the LibQual+ Customer Satisfaction Survey, with responses on their website, the team declared a feature of good practice. This was 'the proactive and responsive approach of the library service to user needs'.<sup>143</sup> One report was notable in recording that an institution ran 'few surveys, relying on module evaluation responses and national surveys as its main feedback vehicles'. This characteristic contributed to what the team regarded as systemic issues in using student feedback, regarding it as desirable 'that the University develop coherent and timely mechanisms for gathering, analysing and responding to student feedback across all provision'.<sup>144</sup>

## Alumni

52 It could be argued that as alumni are, by definition, no longer students, considering them falls outside the remit of this paper. However, it seems reasonable to mention them as a source of input into the same reflective processes as current students. Very recent graduates will be responding to the NSS and are therefore contributing in that way, if nothing else. A few reports mention the use made by institutions of their recent graduates in processes relating to quality, but little detail was provided. One specialist institution was an exception. The team were able to record that 'alumni play a larger than normal role in the deliberative structures of the institution, including as members of periodic review panels'.<sup>145</sup> In a few cases where alumni were referred to, this was in connection with periodic review.<sup>146</sup> One report mentioned 'the outcomes of meetings with groups of current students and academic staff, as well as alumni and employers' as contributing to annual programme

<sup>140</sup> Royal Holloway, paragraph 55.

<sup>141</sup> Manchester Metropolitan University, paragraph 80.

<sup>142</sup> Royal Northern College of Music, paragraph 42.

<sup>143</sup> Cranfield University, paragraphs 73, 74 and 131.

<sup>144</sup> York St. John University, paragraph 46.

<sup>145</sup> Ashridge, paragraph 84.

<sup>146</sup> University of Chester, paragraph 39; University of East London, paragraph 18.

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monitoring.<sup>147</sup> In another case, focus groups using alumni were 'a regular part of the development of new programmes'.<sup>148</sup>

### Responding to student feedback

53 Having elicited student feedback, a key question is how students know about any response. This is sometimes referred to as 'closing the loop'. Earlier sections of this paper described formal representational systems, and if reliance is put upon these to inform the student body of actions taken in response to, say, survey results, then their strengths and weaknesses will be reflected in how well the loop is closed. However, institutions can also make attempts to communicate their responses to feedback directly to the student body. There was a single feature of good practice related to feeding back to students, but three recommendations for improving such processes.

54 Letting the following cohort of students know what was done in response to the preceding students' views at the level of a module is something with which students can directly engage. At one institution, students told the team they were informed by a student evaluation section in unit guides and the team viewed this as good practice.<sup>149</sup> This approach was also adopted in another institution,<sup>150</sup> but in this case, while part of an approach supported by students, it was not flagged as a feature of good practice. In another institution, a similar approach was adopted by some staff. However, the practice was not mandatory and the inconsistency led the team to conclude 'the University may wish to consider the usefulness of incorporating this information as part of its Module Guide template'.<sup>151</sup> Students at another institution also stated that they 'receive little or no information on how their feedback is used', leading the team to recommend that it was desirable 'that the University College strengthen its procedures for informing students of its response to module-level feedback'.<sup>152</sup>

55 A few institutions make use of 'You Said, We Did' exercises. These could be made visible through a website.<sup>153</sup> In one case this was dedicated to NSS responses, but 'students the team met felt little ownership over these outcomes, as the NSS surveys students in their final year of study'.<sup>154</sup> Another institution had more success with a similar scheme, where a web page was supplemented with physical posters.<sup>155</sup> In another institution, the 'You Said, We Did' campaign was associated with other moves to enhance response and communication. Unfortunately, this was not yet fully effective, leading the team to conclude that it would be 'desirable that the University achieve consistency in the operation of its processes for managing feedback from students'.<sup>156</sup> Two institutions had difficulties effectively communicating responses to their students and this contributed to a wider package of related issues, leading to recommendations to review and consider such matters.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> University of Plymouth, paragraph 67.

<sup>148</sup> The College of Law, paragraph 96.

<sup>149</sup> London South Bank University, paragraph 73.

<sup>150</sup> University of Worcester, paragraph 63.

<sup>151</sup> University of Cumbria, paragraph 62.

<sup>152</sup> St. Mary's University College, paragraph 32.

<sup>153</sup> Canterbury Christ Church University, paragraph 79, University of Newcastle, paragraph 57.

<sup>154</sup> University of Bolton, paragraph 70.

<sup>155</sup> University of Worcester, paragraph 67.

<sup>156</sup> University of Cumbria, paragraph 64.

<sup>157</sup> The Courtauld Institute of Art, paragraph 52; Guildhall School of Music & Drama, paragraph 34.

## The themes in context

56 The earlier paper in this series, *Outcomes from Institutional audit: 2007-09*, makes contextual reference to a range of sectoral developments that still have resonance with the reviews dealt with in this paper. In particular, the introduction of the NSS has proved to be of considerable influence, with its near universal appearance in the reports reviewed for this paper. It is also evident that it has stimulated the development of other internal surveys.

57 The issue of student engagement, while increasingly discussed across higher education during the period under review, was not one directly addressed by the institutional audit process in that there was no direct question that audit teams had to answer, or for which institutions had to prepare evidence. Consequently, the analyses in this paper are as a result of inference drawn from across the range of annexed content. The primary contributing sections were 'Role of students in quality assurance', 'Institutional Approach to Quality Enhancement' and 'Management information - feedback from students'. However, relevant material was drawn widely from annexes as teams either responded to particular institutional approaches or exercised their own discretion as to where matters such as surveys were addressed.

58 Auditors' expectations in regard to the main themes addressed here were guided by emerging thinking at QAA itself, as well as what they saw as the evolving sectoral norms revealed through audit activity and their other professional interactions. In the case of QAA, its increasing concern for student engagement is evidenced by, for example: its Strategy 2011-14; its Student Engagement team working with the National Union of Students in a collaborative project to develop student engagement; a Student Sounding Board that reports to the QAA Board of Directors; and, since 2009, students have been members of audit teams.<sup>158</sup>

59 The themes that emerged concerning the representational hierarchy are consistent with the *Dimensions of Student Engagement*<sup>159</sup> as expressed in the spectrum of engagement developed by the Higher Education Academy. However, in the case of the reviewed annexes, the themes emerged 'bottom-up' from the examples of activity, rather than 'top-down' from a conceptual framework, so it is reassuring to see these approaches in alignment. The more directly pedagogic definition of student engagement given in *Chapter B5: Student engagement* of the Quality Code is:

Improving the motivation of students to engage in learning and to learn independently.

A similar hierarchy was noted in the equivalent *Outcomes* paper for Institutional Review in Wales, *Part three: Institutions' arrangements for engaging with students and with the wider world*.<sup>160</sup>

60 In connection with the sharing of external examiners' reports, which was the weakest area of institutional activity considered in this paper, the expectations of HEFCE 2006/45 are somewhat overtaken by the new Expectations expressed in *Chapter B7: External examining* of the Quality Code. In the former, the expectation was that institutions should prepare to share reports with student representatives. Consequently, auditors did not

<sup>158</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/Partners/students/student-engagement-QAA/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Partners/students/student-engagement-QAA/Pages/default.aspx) (last accessed 26 September 2012).

<sup>159</sup> [www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/studentengagement/Dimensions\\_student\\_engagement](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/studentengagement/Dimensions_student_engagement) (last accessed 29 August 2012).

<sup>160</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/QAA321OutcomesWales\\_PartThree.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/QAA321OutcomesWales_PartThree.pdf) (last accessed 25 September 2012).

## Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2009-2011

base any limited judgements of confidence on poor performance in this regard, but confined themselves to recommendations of varying degree, depending on how well an institution was prepared. When the Quality Code forms the basis for the new Institutional Review method to be introduced from 2011-12, the indicator is such that it will be expected that reports are shared. Judging from some of the reports reviewed here, without determined action this may present a challenge for some institutions.

## Trends

61 Regarding student engagement, many of the issues raised in this paper also recur in the previous *Outcomes Series 3* paper. In that regard, the outcome may be considered disappointing, representing, as it does, another two years for development since the previous round of audits. *Outcomes Series 1* (2005) and *Series 2* (2009) papers also covered similar themes in relation to the attempts at eliciting meaningful engagement.<sup>161</sup> There are also striking similarities in the documented strengths and weakness as reported in the Welsh *Outcomes* paper addressing this topic. It is clear that creating active and sustainable student engagement is not a single event, for example the establishment of representational structures and opportunities. Over time an institution that has acceptable systems may find that they have become less effective for a variety of reasons, coupled with rising expectations also requiring response. There has to be considerable and sustained effort put into the operation of systems if they are to succeed. The 20 features of good practice compared to 26 related recommendations provide an opposing balance to the 27 features of good practice and 17 recommendations of the earlier equivalent *Outcomes Series 3* paper. It is to be hoped that this changing balance does not represent the start of a declining trend. What is consistent here with the earlier *Outcomes Series 3* paper is the desire shown by the majority of institutions to work with their students to maintain standards and enhance provision. It is also evident, as it was previously, that many institutions are acting on that desire and taking active steps to improve matters.

62 There were proportionally more recommendations than features of good practice relating to what might be generally termed 'student engagement' compared with the *Outcomes Series 3* paper *Student engagement and support* covering the period 2007-09. Compared to the number of institutions involved, there was a similar proportion of features of good practice. This may be interpreted as meaning that the sample of institutions covered here are indicating that the sector generally is reaching a plateau regarding its engagement with students, and that there is still room for improvement, with no simple answers to achieving effective and sustained performance. It may also mean that auditor's expectations of practice increased in the later round of audits.

63 As with the *Outcomes Series 3* papers *Managing academic standards* and *External involvement in quality management* covering the period 2007-09, the picture concerning the systematic sharing of external examiners' reports is not a strong one. It is uncommon for institutions to be reported as having successfully addressed this matter in terms of the generality of the student body being aware of their content. There is usually a policy in place, but the derived process fails to operate as hoped, depending as it often does upon the consistent application of other aspects of the student representation system. The total number of audit recommendations discussed here was dominated by those calling for improvement to the systems employed to share external examiners' reports, with approximately 45 per cent relating to this topic.

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<sup>161</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-from-institutional-auditStudent-representationand-feedback-arrangements.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-from-institutional-auditStudent-representationand-feedback-arrangements.aspx) (accessed 1 October 2012).  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-from-institutional-audit---Student-representation-and-feedback-arrangements---Second-series.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-from-institutional-audit---Student-representation-and-feedback-arrangements---Second-series.aspx) (accessed 1 October 2012).

## Conclusions

64 From the analysis of 59 of the audit reports published between September 2009 and July 2011, it is clear that most institutions are making serious attempts to engage their students in quality assurance and enhancement, many in an effective manner. Institutions that find it difficult to involve their students significantly tend to be those that are unusual in their constitution. Overall most success was found for representation at the programme or course level where, in general, students can feel engaged and be represented, and at the institutional level, where officers of the Students' Union can make a beneficial contribution to policy discussions. It is the middle layer of institutional structures with which it is most difficult to gain student engagement; the indications are that this is because faculties tend to be operating at the level of routine quality assurance processes not seen by students to have a direct impact upon their experience and are not bodies that they relate to personally. A substantial number of reports note that formal systems are significantly supported by informal opportunities for feedback. Some groups of students, those off-campus, part-time and to a lesser extent, postgraduate research, are less well addressed by existing systems for student engagement than full-time, on-campus, taught students are. Alumni or recent graduates are infrequently tapped into as sources of feedback.

65 Widespread survey use is evident, particularly in terms of what is called student satisfaction, to supplement formal representative systems. The growth in the use and impact of national surveys is also clear, particularly the NSS, consideration of which is now well embedded within the sector. However, its specific focus on final year undergraduates limits its applicability for some institutions. Another other major use of surveys is to gather information regarding module or unit delivery, where the results are normally incorporated into annual monitoring processes. A sectoral strength evident in these reports was that only one institution kept such evaluations confidential.

66 By consideration of the positive and negative features noted in the audit reports under consideration in this paper, some general characteristics of successful systems for student engagement can be drawn out.

67 It is notable that for an institution to do well in engaging its students, it needs to work in partnership with their representative body, the Students' Union. This is not just formally, but at the level of personal working relationships such that Students' Union officers can have ready and comfortable access to senior staff. The institutional culture should be such that the expectation is that all parts of the deliberative structure that can have student representation, do so. Working groups and initiatives for enhancement start from the premise that students should be represented and involved. In other words, the place of students is embedded in the work and life of the institution and their involvement is the norm unless clearly inappropriate, for example for reasons of confidentiality. Student representatives are a transient population and systems for their training and support need to be in place. This can be helped if there are dedicated staff roles to assist in the development and implementation of representatives and the system. Institutions can support active engagement through effective oversight and administrative support that facilitates good communication between representatives and their constituencies and periodically monitors the health of the system. There may be a dedicated institutional committee to act as a focus for student feedback and system monitoring. The formal representative system should be complemented by targeted surveys to allow students to have a voice. Institutions should seek innovative ways to involve students that are tailored to their own particular circumstances. Having collected feedback from students, institutions should respond in a timely manner and communicate the results back to the student body as widely as possible. Modern communications can assist in that regard. Systems should take care to be equally effective for all students.



## **Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2009-2011**

68 By comparison with the overall picture of student engagement, the sharing of external examiners' reports is less successful. This was particularly noticeable in terms of the proportion of recommendations that related to this area of activity - nearly half. Most institutions are reported as expecting reports to be shared through existing systems. However, student feedback systems are generally stronger in gathering student views than disseminating the results of actions and discussions informed by those views. In some measure, that asymmetry contributes to the difficulties associated with sharing external examiners' reports. It requires consistency in operation of the representation system across an institution for policy to operate successfully. Giving students an active role in considering external examiners' reports, perhaps as part of the annual monitoring process, was noted as being effective institutional practice.

## Appendix A: Features of good practice relating to student engagement

- The 'feedback-hungry' culture and responsiveness to matters raised by students (Ashridge, paragraph 82).
- The close and sustained partnership between the University and its students which enhances the learning experience (Birmingham City University, paragraphs 75, 100, 120 and 149).
- The promotion of innovation in learning and teaching achieved by the Student Academic Partners Scheme (Birmingham City University, paragraphs 76 and 120).
- The impact of the Redesign of the Learning Experience as a mechanism for systematic enhancement that engages staff and students (Birmingham City University, paragraphs 118 to 119).
- The comprehensive arrangements for student feedback and its use in quality assurance and enhancement (Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, paragraphs 83 to 87 and 149).
- The involvement of external consultants, students and employers in the curriculum development stage of the validation process (Buckinghamshire New University, paragraph 29).
- The close working relationship between the University and the Students' Union (Buckinghamshire New University, paragraph 69).
- The proactive and responsive approach of the library service to user needs (Cranfield University, paragraphs 73, 74 and 131).
- The introduction of Student Democracy Coordinators as a means of enhancing the effectiveness of the student voice (Liverpool John Moores University, paragraph 53).
- The inclusion in the Unit Guide template of an opportunity to report back to students on the actions taken in response to student feedback from the previous year (London South Bank University, paragraph 73).
- The close working relationship between the University and the Students' Union in enhancing student representation at a variety of levels within the institution (Oxford Brookes University, paragraphs 13, 79, 85 and 86).
- The introduction of the Student Support Coordinator role as a focal point for student contact (Oxford Brookes University, paragraph 106).
- The use of student experience working groups, following student-led agendas, to review and enhance the student experience (Royal Holloway, paragraph 55).
- The open and responsive approach to student feedback, which ensures that students contribute to the enhancement of their learning experience (Royal Northern College of Music, paragraph 41).
- The development of a closer working relationship between the University Executive and the Students' Union (University of Derby, paragraph 88).
- The comprehensiveness and clarity of University guidance materials provided to staff, students and external participants involved in its quality assurance processes (University of Northumbria at Newcastle, paragraph 63).
- The effective partnership between the University and the student body in ensuring the proactive involvement in and valuable contribution made by students at all levels to the quality assurance processes, the formal deliberative structures and other aspects of University deliberations (University of Northumbria at Newcastle, paragraph 82).
- The University's systems for listening and responding to the student voice (University of Nottingham, paragraph 75).
- The effective partnership between the University and the Students' Union to support student representation processes on taught programmes at all levels of the institution (University of Teesside, paragraph 60).

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- The Student Academic Representatives (StARs) initiative, which enhances student representation (University of Worcester, paragraphs 70 to 74).

## Appendix B: Recommendations relating to student engagement

- Keep under review the operation, terms of reference and membership of central committees responsible for the management of quality and standards (Ashridge, paragraph 22).
- Consider introducing student membership of school teaching quality and enhancement committees (Birkbeck College, paragraph 60).
- Develop comprehensive support for the training of student representatives (Birkbeck College, paragraph 62).
- Implement measures to improve the effectiveness of student representation and participation on Conservatoire committees (Conservatoire for Dance and Drama, paragraph 48).
- Review the effectiveness of its communication with students about policies, procedures and action taken in response to matters raised through feedback and consultation processes (Courtauld Institute of Art, paragraph 52).
- Consider how it might promote and support effective student representation and involvement in decision-making by all student constituencies, including the potential benefits of providing formal training for representatives (Courtauld Institute of Art, paragraph 56).
- Establish formal and systematic module-level monitoring as a requirement in annual programme evaluation (Guildhall School of Music and Drama, paragraph 15).
- Ensure that careful consideration is given to all aspects of student feedback, and the outcome of that consideration is effectively and appropriately communicated to all students concerned (Guildhall School of Music and Drama, paragraph 34).
- Establish clear reporting lines to a higher institutional level for the Staff/Student Liaison Committee (Guildhall School of Music and Drama, paragraph 35).
- Reflect upon the planned formal processes for capturing the views and involvement of students in programme development to ensure they are fit for purpose (Heythrop College, University of London, paragraph 80).
- Provide a full and consistent level of student representation in all its deliberative academic committees (Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, paragraph 67).
- Ensure the systematic collection, analysis, dissemination and utilisation of student data and feedback (King's College London, paragraph 52).
- Establish a systematic means of assuring itself that departmental practices are fully aligned with its regulatory and other requirements (London School of Economics and Political Science, paragraphs 15 and 37).
- Review its strategies for student representation to ensure that students are enabled to engage fully with University and faculty-level deliberative structures (London South Bank University, paragraph 79).
- Ensure that a single institutional policy for the student-staff consultative committees is published and consistently applied (Newman University College, Birmingham, paragraph 95).
- Strengthen its procedures for informing students of its response to module-level feedback (St. Mary's University College, paragraph 32).
- Develop a stronger role for students in the management of the quality of their learning opportunities at faculty level (Staffordshire University, paragraph 81).
- Respond to students in a more timely, informative and coherent manner on the actions arising from student feedback and consultation (University of West London, paragraph 37).

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- Strengthen the provision, particularly in the faculties, for student and staff representation and involvement in decision-making (University College Plymouth St. Mark and St. John, paragraph 54).
- Achieve consistency in the operation of the University's processes for managing feedback from students (University of Cumbria, paragraph 64).
- Clarify to students and staff the communication channels available to students to bring forward their views and be involved in quality management processes (University of Gloucestershire, paragraph 67).
- Require the School of Advanced Study to develop and implement a systematic approach to its engagement with students, with particular reference to: collecting, considering and responding to feedback (paragraph 34); training representatives (paragraph 37); making available and ensuring awareness of informed and impartial advice about School procedures (paragraph 48); and making available and ensuring awareness of information about English language support (University of London, paragraphs 49 and 66).
- Implement measures designed to achieve greater response rates to internal student surveys (University of Manchester, paragraphs 50 and 73).
- Give consideration to the greater involvement of student representation in the University's formal quality assurance processes (University of Plymouth, paragraph 76).
- Consider ways of extending active participation of students in the quality assurance of educational provision (University of Ulster, paragraph 41).
- Strengthen their implementation of the *Code of practice*, particularly in regard to postgraduate research students who undertake teaching, but also by ensuring robust and representative feedback from postgraduate research students (University of Westminster, Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students).
- Develop coherent and timely mechanisms for gathering, analysing and responding to student feedback across all provision (York St. John University, paragraph 46).

## Sharing external examiners' reports

- Ensure that the reports of all external examiners are routinely discussed by programme committees, including student representatives (Buckinghamshire New University, paragraph 44).
- Share external examiner reports with student representatives in accordance with the HEFCE publication Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, phase two outcomes, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45) (Courtauld Institute of Art, paragraph 128).
- Make external examiners' reports available as a matter of course to student representatives (Cranfield University, paragraph 37).
- Routinely share external examiner reports with student representatives (Heythrop College, University of London, paragraph 50).
- Extend the existing opportunities for student access to external examiners' reports (Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, paragraph 43).
- Develop its procedures for engaging with external examiners and their reports, including preparing them for their role, sharing their reports with students and ensuring that all issues raised in each report are considered and addressed, and the response communicated to the external examiner in a timely manner (King's College London, paragraphs 30 and 85).
- Work towards ensuring that external examiners' reports are seen consistently by all boards of studies and, thus, by student representatives (Liverpool John Moores University, paragraphs 24 and 166).

## Student engagement

- Require external examiners' reports to be written in such a way as to facilitate their being shared consistently with student representatives (London Metropolitan University, paragraph 18).
- Ensure the publication of all external examiner reports through the existing University College procedures (Newman University College, Birmingham, paragraphs 87 and 163).
- Ensure that full external examiner reports are shared with student representatives (Norwich University College of the Arts, paragraph 77).
- Work towards making external examiners' reports available to student representatives in accordance with HEFCE 2006/45 (Staffordshire University, paragraphs 48 and 142).
- Extend the opportunities that currently exist for student access to external examiners' reports (University College Birmingham, paragraph 13).
- Take further steps to increase the effective participation of students at all levels of the deliberative structure (University of Derby, paragraph 90).
- Share external examiner reports with student representatives, including those studying through collaborative arrangements, in accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes, October 2006* (HEFCE 06/45) (University College Plymouth St. Mark and St. John, paragraph 124).
- Share external examiner reports with student representatives, including those studying through collaborative arrangements (University of Cumbria, paragraphs 30 and 132).
- Ensure that external examiner reports are routinely shared with relevant student representatives (University of Derby, paragraph 89).
- Encourage the School of Advanced Study to consistently share external examiners' reports with student representatives (University of London, paragraphs 36 and 74).
- Share external examiner reports with student representatives at all levels in all faculties (University of Manchester, paragraphs 32 and 89).
- Reflect on how it may satisfy itself that its policy on sharing external examiner reports with students is implemented consistently (University of Nottingham, paragraph 162).
- Ensure that external examiners' reports are routinely shared with relevant student representatives (University of Westminster, paragraph 46).
- Ensure that external examiners' reports are consistently shared with students (York St. John University, paragraphs 18 and 92).

## **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, revised 2009).

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: Institutional Audit reports

### 2009-10

Birkbeck, University of London  
 Bishop Grosseteste University College  
 Lincoln  
 Brunel University  
 Buckinghamshire New University  
 Canterbury Christ Church University  
 Conservatoire for Dance and Drama  
 Cranfield University  
 Edge Hill University  
 Guildhall School of Music and Drama  
  
 Harper Adams University College  
 Imperial College of Science, Technology  
 and Medicine  
 Institute of Education  
 King's College, London  
 Liverpool John Moores University  
 London South Bank University  
 The Manchester Metropolitan University  
 Staffordshire University  
 University of Bedfordshire  
  
 University of Chester  
 University of Derby  
  
 University of East London  
 University of Gloucestershire  
 University of Huddersfield  
 University of Newcastle upon Tyne  
  
 University of Northumbria at Newcastle  
 University of Nottingham  
 University of Plymouth  
 University of Teesside  
 University of Ulster  
 University of Westminster

### 2010-11

The Arts University College at  
 Bournemouth  
 Ashridge  
  
 Birmingham City University  
 The College of Law  
 The Courtauld Institute for Art  
 Heythrop College  
 Kingston University  
 London Metropolitan University  
 London School of Economics and  
 Political Science  
 Newman University College, Birmingham  
 Oxford Brookes University  
  
 Norwich University College of the Arts  
 Queen Mary, University of London  
 Royal Holloway, University of London  
 Royal Northern College of Music  
 Sheffield Hallam University  
 St. George's Hospital Medical School  
 St. May's University College,  
 Twickenham  
 University College Birmingham  
 University College of Plymouth St. Mark  
 and St. John  
 University of Bolton  
 University of Cumbria  
 University of London  
 University of London International  
 Programmes  
 University of Manchester  
 University of West London  
 University of Worcester  
 Writtle College  
 York St. John University

The full text of the Institutional Audit reports is available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews).



## **Appendix E: Titles in *Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2009-11***

- Student engagement
- Assessment and feedback
- Postgraduate research students
- Collaborative provision arrangements

All published *Outcomes* papers can be found at  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/ImprovingHigherEducation/Pages/reviews.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/ImprovingHigherEducation/Pages/reviews.aspx).

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