Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2009-11

Assessment

Third series

Contents

Preface

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

While there is marked diversity of assessment in UK higher education, in any given case it is closely aligned with intended learning outcomes. Most institutions audited between 2009 and 2011 had robust arrangements, with appropriate externality, for the scrutiny of these intended learning outcomes during programme approval and periodic review. A number of recommendations concerned annual monitoring; several reports noted inconsistencies and variability in the annual monitoring process and its reporting at both local and institutional levels.

Virtually all institutions engaged effectively with the Academic Infrastructure.[1] Most institutions had adopted intended learning outcomes and articulated associated assessment strategies within their programme specifications, and audit reports indicated that these were at least adequate and often better. In a few cases module/course unit and programme outcomes needed to align with each other, and generic outcomes needed to be replaced by programme specific ones.

Most reports indicated the crucial role played by external examiners in monitoring and moderating standards. There were numerous instances of good practice but there were also significant recommendations: for the more effective deployment of external examiners; to enhance feedback to promote a strategic institutional approach to standards and assessment; and the implementation of more consistent monitoring of responses to externals' recommendations. The remit, conduct and reporting of examination boards also provided instances of good practice, and recommendations for action including, in some cases, enhanced institutional monitoring. Examples of good practice in addressing academic malpractice, especially plagiarism and the provision of guidance to students, were identified in several institutions.

Most universities and colleges have institution-wide assessment regulations. Diversity in marking and classification schemes, and in considering mitigating circumstances, was appreciably less than in previous audit cycles. While some allow limited variation to reflect distinct discipline cultures and to promote local ownership, this could lead to inconsistencies and variability of practice that audit reports recommended it advisable to rectify.

There were instances of good practice in the use of management information for monitoring student achievement and for strategic planning. However, there were also numerous recommendations for further action relating to the use of management information systems (MIS) to provide data. Even where robust IT systems were in place - as identified in most audits in the period 2009-11 - institutions did not always make fully effective use of student data to inform academic policy. However, improved IT and virtual learning environment provision had prompted numerous imaginative e-learning and blended learning initiatives at all higher education levels coupled, in some cases, with significant staff development.

Consistent with other information sources, many audit reports remarked on student concerns over the timeliness and quality of feedback on their assessed work. Even when institutional policies sought to address this issue, practice on the ground sometimes fell short.

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[1] The Academic Infrastructure has now been replaced by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). For information see www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode.

Context

1   This account is based on a review of the outcomes of the 59 institutional audits conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) published between September 2009 and July 2011. A full list of the reports is given in Annex D (page 41). These reports complement those for the 76 institutions reported on in *Outcomes* Series 2 (September 2006-July 2009); together they encompass higher education provision in England over a five year period. A brief description of the methodology used in analysing the reports in this and other *Outcomes* Series 3 papers is provided in Annex C (page 40).

2   The institutions within the period 2009-11 include long-established civic universities, campus universities founded in the 1960's following the Robbins Report, post-1992 universities created from former polytechnics, and recent universities and university colleges formed from Colleges of Higher Education, as well as several monotechnic and specialist institutions. Student numbers range from a few hundred to tens of thousands. The audit reports therefore provide a largely representative sample of the current institutional range and diversity within the higher education sector, the only omission being the ancient collegiate universities, with both the Oxford and Cambridge audits covered in *Outcomes* Series 2.

3   As independent institutions, universities are responsible for the design, monitoring and revision of their own assessment regimes within the cycle of initial programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review. Such work is typically undertaken by disciplinary, cross or multidisciplinary teams as appropriate. Both initial approval and periodic review typically involve external expert scrutiny including, the views of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) where relevant; while annual monitoring is informed by the views of external examiners. There is thus a significant external perspective on the design and outcomes of assessment, as on other aspects of programme design.

4   Reference points for both internal and external review were, at the time of the audits, provided by the elements of the Academic Infrastructure: the level and qualification descriptors of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), subject benchmark statements, and the 10 sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of quality and standards in higher education.* The most relevant of these for assessment are *Section 4: External Examining; Section 6: Assessment of students* and *Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review.*[2] Central to assuring standards and quality is the production of a specification for each programme, detailing its intended learning outcomes together with associated assessment through which students are given the opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the outcome.[3] Similar specifications may also be produced at module or other sub-programme levels, but in all cases congruence of intended learning outcomes with modes and nature of assessment is crucial for securing standards.

5   All the audited institutions could be expected to be familiar with the elements of the Academic Infrastructure. Revised versions of *Section 6* and *Section 7* were published in 2006, and *Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters* and *Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* in 2007. Revisions of other relevant parts

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[2] At the end of 2011 the Academic Infrastructure was migrated to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). From September 2012 the Quality Code formed the basis for external reviews conducted by QAA. www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode. Details of how the elements of the Academic Infrastructure map across into the Quality Code can be found at: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Mapping-the-Quality-Code.aspx

[3] QAA (2006) *Guidelines for programme specifications*, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Guidelines-for-preparing-programme-specifications.aspx

such as *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* and *Section 3: Disabled students* were only published in 2010 and so were unlikely to have influenced institutional policy at the time of the audits.

6   Other higher education developments with potential impact on assessment occurred prior to and during the audit period. They included: the publication, annually, of the findings of the National Student Survey (NSS);[4] the ongoing development of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR),[5] the report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills enquiry into Students and Universities;[6] and the review of external examining conducted by UUK and GuildHE, working with QAA.[7] At the same time as the Select Committee enquiry QAA undertook a series of Thematic Enquiries, including one on assessment and degree classification,[8] while HEFCE conducted its own investigation of teaching quality and the student experience.[9]

7   Successive NSS results have shown lower levels of satisfaction and expressions of concern among students about the quality and timeliness of the feedback they receive on their assessed work compared with most other aspects of the student experience. Such concern is not confined to a small minority of universities or any particular type of institution: the concern is effectively sector-wide. It is, however, one that many institutions have recognised and sought to address, at least in part prompted by the growing influence of university league tables both as an information source for potential candidates and as a reputational marker.[10]

8   Current assessment regimes are typically diverse: most honours programmes include an assessed dissertation, extended essay or project, and there is often a sizeable component of summative, as well as formative, coursework. Some programmes incorporate open-book examinations, or may make provision for group work, and peer- or self-assessment. Many programmes, at all levels, include a component of practical work which in some cases may reach 100 per cent of assessment.

9   Section 6 of the revised *Code of practice*[11] required institutions to have effective systems for the design, monitoring and review of assessment strategies, rigorous implementation policies that promote effective student learning and secure award standards, and accurate recording and communication systems for the transmission of marks. Assessment and moderating needs to be conducted with equity, probity and transparency, and there should be clear guidance covering the membership and business of examination boards. The amount and timing of assessment needs to provide satisfactory measurement of students' achievement of intended learning outcomes, and there must be clear rules for progression, for meeting PSRB requirements, and for eligibility for an award. Institutions should promote students' learning through the provision of suitably detailed, timely feedback

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[4] National Student Survey, available at www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2012/name,75522,en.html
[5] *Bringing it all together: Introducing the HEAR,* available at:
http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Pages/introducingtheHEAR.aspx
[6] Parliamentary Select Committee for Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills report: *Students and Universities,* July 2009
[7] www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Newsroom/Media-Releases/Pages/UniversitiesUKsetsoutplanstoimproveexternalexaminingsystem.aspx.The recommendations of this report were incorporated into a revised version of what was Section 4 of the QAA *Code of practice,* published as *Chapter B7: External Examining* of the Quality Code, in October 2011
[8] *Thematic enquiries into concerns about academic quality and standards in higher education in England - Final report*, April 2009, available at
www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/FinalReportApril09.pdf
[9] *Report of the sub-committee for Teaching, Quality, and the Student Experience HEFCE's statutory responsibility for quality assurance,* HEFCE, October 2009
[10] The results for 2012 show a small increase in the overall satisfaction score, available at www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2012/name,75522,en.html and http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/
[11] Now *Chapter B6: Assessment and the accreditation of prior learning* of the Quality Code.

and should also aim to make them aware of their educational responsibilities and encourage them to adopt good academic practice.

10   The very great majority of higher education institutions (HEIs) met these obligations, as witnessed by the fact that all but five of the audit reports considered here contained judgements of confidence in the soundness of institutions' current and likely future management of academic standards and of learning opportunities. The audit teams reached judgements of limited confidence (rather than no confidence) for the remaining cases: in four instances for their management of academic standards in collaborative provision (in two cases for collaborative activity generally[12] and for two others limited to overseas collaborative provision,[13] for one of which the judgement related to just one aspect of one element of its overseas provision).[14] While one institution's current management of learning opportunities received a judgment of confidence, its likely future management (in relation to collaborative provision) received limited confidence.[15] One university received a judgement of limited confidence in the soundness of its current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards generally.[16] These findings are broadly comparable with the judgements reported in *Outcomes* Series 2.

11   QAA audit reports typically make only limited explicit reference to assessment per se - most obviously in the section covering Assessment Policies and Regulations. Nonetheless, assessment underpins and pervades much of the remainder of Section 2 on Institutional Management of Academic Standards, and may well be referred to in other sections of the report and annex – for example those dealing with Other Modes of Study. This paper accordingly takes a broad perspective in reviewing assessment together with aspects of the assurance of higher education provision that influence it.

Themes

12   A reading of the audit reports, their features of good practice and recommendations for action indicates the following main themes bearing on assessment warrant further discussion:

- the processes of programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review
- engagement with the Academic Infrastructure
- the adequacy of programme specifications and the identification of intended learning outcomes
- the role of external examiners
- the membership, conduct and reporting of examination boards
- the clarity and consistency of institutional assessment policies and regulations
- other modes of study and assessment
- the provision of management information relating to students' academic performance, and the use made of such data
- feedback to students on their academic progress
- academic malpractice.

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[12] Brunel University Report and Annex; University of Bolton Report and Annex
[13] University College Plymouth St Mark and St John Report and Annex; Liverpool John Moores University Report and Annex;
[14] Liverpool John Moores University Report and Annex
[15] University of Bolton Report and Annex
[16] York St John University Report and Annex

13   Arrangements for the review, progression and assessment of research students are considered in the *Outcomes* paper relating to the audits in 2007-2009*.* They are not considered in this paper, since they are the subject of a separate *Outcomes* report.[17]

The processes of programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review

14   Programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review provide opportunities for detailed scrutiny and (re) consideration of intended learning outcomes and their alignment with modes of assessment. Most institutions had robust arrangements, incorporating appropriate externality in their procedures for programme approval and periodic review, and several instances of good practice were identified in audit reports. Some reports noted aspects where improvements could usefully be made.

Programme approval

15   Instances of good practice included the extensive use of external consultants, students and employers in the curriculum development phase of one university's programme validation process,[18] and the nature and range of externality, formally utilising external subject-specific expertise to considerable depth and extent, in the case of another university's programme development process.[19] Another institution's two-stage approval process, allowing early systematic review of new programmes that typically resulted in further improvement of the student experience, was considered a feature of good practice.[20] In another case, the effective contribution of the various central services to programme approval and review processes was cited as good practice.[21]

16   In contrast, several institutions were advised to extend external representation, to regularise panel composition, and to ensure consistent and active engagement with external assessors' reports in their programme approval and review processes.[22] One institution was advised to ensure that programme validation reports made explicit reference to the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmark statements in establishing standards.[23] A specialist institution was recommended to ensure that all validation and review panel reports included confirmation of engagement with the Academic Infrastructure in line with its own procedures, and that it set deadlines for the implementation and reporting of actions following recommendations at validation and review, rather than merely undertaking to introduce them.[24] Reflecting the view that internal academic discussion of its programme proposals was inconsistently robust, a university college was advised to review and rebalance quality and standards work to promote a more analytical and influential role for school committees and its Validation and Review Committee, and to involve a wider pool of academic staff.[25] Another university college was advised to ensure that all programmes were formally approved before students were enrolled, that it established a more realistic and timely

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[17] www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/outcomes-assessment-and-feedback.aspx
[18] Buckinghamshire New University paragraphs 28,29
[19] Liverpool John Moores University paragraph 17
[20] Imperial College of Science and Technology paragraphs 28-31
[21] Royal Holloway, University of London paragraph 47
[22] Birkbeck University of London paragraphs 28,29; University of Huddersfield paragraphs 33-42; College of Law paragraph 23; King's College London paragraphs 10-16; London School of Economics & Political Science paragraphs 18-21; St Mary's University College paragraphs 12-15; University of Worcester paragraphs 28-33; York St John University paragraph 20
[23] Royal Holloway, University of London
[24] St Georges Hospital Medical School paragraphs 52,53
[25] St Mary's University College paragraphs 12-15

approach to approval, and provided a more detailed record of the discussions of validation event panels.[26]

Periodic Review

17   Some institutions used the same or similar responsible bodies for programme approval and periodic review, with very similar processes, and referred to 'validation' to describe both initial approval and (re-) approval. Reflecting this, some audit reports did not distinguish between the processes involved in programme approval and periodic review. However, it is clear from the reports that most institutions also had robust mechanisms for periodic review, again incorporating appropriate externality. In the minority of cases where recommendations were made they often applied to both approval and periodic review.[27]

18   Three institutions, including a university undergoing intense change, were recommended to develop explicit and detailed procedures for managing programme closure to protect and secure the learning opportunities and other best interests of students on course.[28] There was a need to ensure effective institutional oversight by, for example, including the relevant bodies responsible for academic standards and programme quality in both the decision to close and in the managing of the process of closure.[29]

Annual Monitoring and Review (AMR)

19   Several institutions' procedures for annual programme review were cited as instances of good practice. They included: the comprehensive nature of a university's process that enabled risks to be identified; the integration of quality assurance procedures with academic planning and resource allocation; and the identification of enhancement activity, combining to provide an effective mechanism for assuring academic quality.[30] Another university's rapporteur system for considering annual reports was cited as particularly effective in providing an independent critique of the monitoring process.[31] Similarly, a university college's revised annual course review process, incorporating a 'cause for concern' element, and which also involved cross-readers, was considered good practice since it both encouraged cross-institutional reflection on standards and the quality of learning opportunities, and aided speedy completion of the process and effective action planning for the following year.[32] Another small specialist institution's process was considered to be well-conceived, thorough and transparent in its execution, leading to action plans that were systematically monitored.[33]

20   Two institutions were advised to reduce variability and ensure consistency in their annual monitoring and oversight. In one case annual reports varied in content with some minimal responses, and there was little evidence of any strategic discussion of them at institutional level. The team accordingly advised the college to improve analysis, evaluation and reflection to achieve better upward reporting and a more informed institutional overview.[34] In the other case faculties were responsible for monitoring annual programme reviews and for making responses to external examiners. Appropriately detailed critical

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[26] University College Plymouth St Mark & St John paragraphs 21,23
[27] University of Huddersfield paragraphs 37-42; Kings College London paragraph 21; London School of Economics & Political Science paragraphs 21,22; University College Birmingham paragraph 17
[28] Birkbeck University of London paragraph 31; University of Cumbria paragraph 58; St Mary's University College paragraph 63
[29] St Mary's University College paragraph 63
[30] Edgehill University paragraphs 28,61
[31] Staffordshire University paragraphs 37, 138
[32] Arts University College Bournemouth paragraphs 27-30
[33] Royal Northern College of Music paragraph 21
[34] Newman University College paragraphs 49-53

reviews were evident in two of the faculties, but not the third. The team accordingly advised the university to ensure consistency in faculty procedures for the annual monitoring of programme reviews, and the consideration of external examiners' reports and the responses to the external examiners.[35]

21   Another university's academic standards were judged potentially at risk by the marked variability of its annual review documentation, lack of evidence for any review of teaching and learning effectiveness or action planning, and omissions in faculty monitoring processes. The audit report therefore advised the university to review the effectiveness of its AMR process to ensure both appropriate monitoring of programmes at field/course level and necessary oversight at institutional level.[36] Another large university exhibited variability in annual monitoring. Higher degrees committees were not required to report on monitoring outcomes by focusing, for example, on programme specifications, or by providing an overview based on all available evidence. The university was accordingly advised to require the school to introduce an approach to annual monitoring that ensured holistic evaluation of each taught and research programme.[37] In a similar vein a small specialist institution was recommended to ensure that all sources of information required in programme annual monitoring were given formal consideration in the light of: the unclear use made of external examiners' reports to inform annual monitoring at course level; the variable reporting of the consideration of annual review reports and associated action lists by programme management meetings; and the absence of a standard set of statistical data for review at programme level.[38]

Engagement with the Academic Infrastructure

22   While there were no instances of institutional good practice cited in relation to the Academic Infrastructure, the reports indicated that the great majority of universities and colleges engaged effectively with it, and there were fewer recommendations for action than with the audit reports published in 2006-09. Both features suggest that the Academic Infrastructure is now a familiar and accepted feature of the higher education landscape, and that full alignment with its provisions is viewed as appropriate, rather than exceptional good practice. This view is supported by the observation that even in instances where specific recommendations were made, as below, in most cases the reports also stated that institutions in general engaged effectively with the Academic Infrastructure.[39]

23   Particular recommendations included: the need for one university routinely to consider more fully how the *Code of practice* mapped on to its own processes,[40] and for a college to ensure that revisions to the *Code of practice* were routinely and systematically considered through its committee structures.[41] Another college, which had no automatic mechanism for considering revisions to the *Code of practice* or updated subject benchmark statements, was recommended to ensure systematic and timely review of revisions to the *Code of practice* or other elements of the Academic Infrastructure as they were published.[42]

24   A specialist institute, recently granted degree awarding powers, was considered to be making appropriate use of parts of the Academic Infrastructure while its engagement with other parts was being developed. However, the audit report also included the conclusion that

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[35] University of West London paragraph 24
[36] Kingston University paragraphs 24-26
[37] University of London, School of Advanced Study paragraphs 19,68
[38] Ashridge paragraph 56
[39] As noted earlier the Academic Infrastructure has been migrated into a new structure as part of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.
[40] Brunel University paragraph 74
[41] Heythrop College, University of London paragraph 73
[42] Bishop Grosseteste University College paragraph 71

the institute's quality assurance processes would be improved by fuller and speedier engagement with the *Code of practice*.[43] A similar picture emerged at another specialist institution's audit: overall institutional engagement with the Academic Infrastructure was considered to be broadly satisfactory but less developed than at discipline-level, and that there was no overarching framework for considering the nature of institutional engagement with the Academic Infrastructure. The audit report therefore recommended that the institute strengthen its procedures for assuring such engagement.[44]

25 Another university had deferred considering the updated FHEQ and its integration into university polices until enhanced IT capacity was available, so that at the time of the audit (March 2010) level descriptors in regulations, quality assurance processes and programme specifications all used old nomenclature. The use of the *Code of practice* to inform development of the university's policies for academic standards was not well understood by staff, and the university had been slow to consider revised sections of the *Code*. The audit report advised the university to accelerate processes for responding to the expectations of the Infrastructure.[45] A specialist institution was recommended to ensure that, in line with its documented procedures, all validation and review panel reports confirmed engagement with the Academic Infrastructure.[46]

26 In the case of a large federated university the audit report noted that no procedure existed to review the alignment of the university's Academic Framework with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points, and advised the university to ensure that it reviewed the currency of its regulatory framework and managed quality and standards in the school. Similarly, the report advised the university to ensure that the school undertook regular reviews of the currency and scope of its quality assurance framework, and required the school to develop a reliable means of assuring itself that it complied with its regulatory framework, with regard to the Academic Infrastructure. The audit report also advised the university to require the school to prescribe common assessment practices for all taught programmes, with variation permitted only after School approval of an academic rationale, in conformity with the *Code of practice, Section 7*.[47]

27 A new university which received a judgment of limited confidence for the soundness of its current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards was advised to ensure that its Independent and Professional Studies Framework met all expectations of the Academic Infrastructure. It was also advised to ensure that the academic standards of its master's level awards aligned with the master's programme level descriptors in the FHEQ, including in the context of different approaches to the acceptability of undergraduate modules for master's level study.[48]

The adequacy of programme specifications and the identification of intended learning outcomes

28 Reflecting the centrality of programme specifications in programme, module and unit design, the great majority of institutions had devised effective programme specifications with appropriate intended learning outcomes. There were several instances of good practice including, at one university college: the simplicity, clarity and flexibility of its frameworks for undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum design; generic unit outlines and programme-specific project briefs designed to guide students through specific study areas and

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[43] Institute of Education paragraphs 44,54
[44] Guildhall School of Music & Drama paragraph 25
[45] Staffordshire University paragraphs 52,57,58
[46] St George's Hospital Medical School paragraph 12
[47] University of London, School of Advanced Study paragraphs 7,10, 22, 26
[48] York St John University paragraphs 29,34

assessment; and the simplification of undergraduate assessment to reduce assessment load and provide better coordination of submission deadlines.[49] Another university college's active involvement of employers and other professional advisers in planning and developing the curriculum and its effective delivery was cited as good practice. Good use was made of the college's strong links with professional bodies in programme design. Employer needs increasingly influenced curriculum development and, in addition to external examiners, professional advisors were appointed who focused on work placement and workplace-delivered modules and who provided a particular perspective on standards and the quality of the undergraduate experience.[50]

29   A conservatoire's introduction of generic level descriptors for framing learning outcomes at the appropriate academic level in programme design was also cited as good practice. The descriptors considered how students in a conservatoire setting would demonstrate the attributes, knowledge and skills associated with qualifications at different levels on the FHEQ, and expressed these in terms more relevant to programmes offering artistic development and professional training. The descriptors were subsequently used by affiliates and as reference points for programmes leading to awards at another institution.[51] The detailed nature of a large university's programme specifications and their ready and secure availability through the internet were cited as good practice. The content management system ensured accurate and accessible information, secure version control and the provision of definitive versions of programme specifications for reproduction in handbooks and on the web.[52]

30   There were also recommendations for further action, principally concerning a small number of instances where specifications were not available for all programmes or, if complete, were not generally available to current or potential students and other interested parties. At one institution, programme specifications had not been completed for all programmes at the time of the audit, and the college was recommended to expedite their availability.[53] At another institution programme descriptions in departmental handbooks did not always include programme learning outcomes or refer to programme specifications, and the existence of the latter was not generally known by students. The audit report therefore recommended that the institution ensure that programme descriptions in departmental handbooks always included overall learning outcomes and their associated assessment.[54] A similar issue was identified at a university college, where programme and subject area handbooks in some cases omitted core programme specification information, including programme aims and learning outcomes, and reference to subject benchmark statements. The institution was accordingly advised to ensure complete, consistent and synchronised publication of programme specifications and handbooks.[55] Another university viewed the programme handbook as the effective programme specification, since it was the main source of student information. However, practical issues of version control led to a decision to produce discrete, formal programme specifications for future approval and revalidation events. Considering this timescale to be over extended, the audit report recommended that the university accelerate the production of readily accessible programme specifications.[56]

31   One university was advised to ensure that its programme specifications were publicly available and that the information published on collaborative partner websites

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[49] Norwich University College of the Arts paragraph 60
[50] Harper Adams University College paragraphs 24,30,33,46
[51] Conservatoire for Dance & Drama paragraphs 17, 28
[52] Liverpool John Moores University paragraph 162
[53] Birkbeck University of London paragraph 44
[54] Royal Holloway, University of London paragraph 30
[55] Newman University College paragraphs 62-64, 194,195
[56] University of Derby paragraph 162

adhered to the *Code of practice, Section 2*.[57] Another institution's programme specifications were also not uniformly published on its partner websites and so not consistently available to potential applicants. The university college was recommended to ensure that partner institutions published full programme specifications in a manner accessible to potential as well as current students.[58]

32   Another university produced programme specifications for single honours programmes, but joint honours students received two separate programme specifications without their experience being addressed. The university was recommended to provide a programme specification for each joint honours award.[59]

The role of external examiners

33   Unsurprisingly, given their crucial role in monitoring quality and standards, many reports paid considerable attention to external examiners: their appointment, training, roles and responsibilities, and institutional responses to their recommendations. There were a small number of instances of good practice: one university's Academic Quality Division (AQD) monitored external examiner reports and categorised their recommendations in relation to academic standards and necessary action via a prioritising 'traffic light' system for faculty attention. AQD also provided an annual report to Senate on the profile of external examiners, their institutional backgrounds, the appointing system, and comments on emerging themes, good practice and areas for improvement.[60] Another university had established a committee to consider all appointments, and introduced a purpose-designed data base to track appointments, and those of its staff appointed elsewhere to address concerns about variability in the rigour of the external examiner appointing process, the frequency of reciprocal appointments and the over-representation of a small number of institutions among its own body of external examiners.[61] At a further institution external examiners' reports were considered speedily within a revised Annual Course Review, so allowing responses and effective action planning to be implemented by the start of the next academic year.[62]

34   Many recommendations centred around ensuring effective institutional consistency in relation to external examiners and their role. At a specialist institution, with a need to balance representation of academic and professional expertise among its external examiners, there were instances where the audit report questioned whether the sole external examiner could provide the requisite 'informed view of UK higher education standards'. The team recommended that the institution clarify its criteria for screening external examiner nominations.[63] The audit report for another institution noted inconsistencies in the tracking of external examiner appointments that posed potential threats to its exercise of due process while its limited capacity to oversee school nominations similarly posed a potential threat to academic standards. The university was accordingly advised to strengthen institutional oversight of the appointing process for external examiners process.[64]

35   A university that had devolved responsibility for briefing and inducting external examiners to its schools was advised to reconsider its policy in this area in light of the consequent risk of variability in the training offered.[65] A specialist arts institution making

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[57] University of Cumbria paragraph 157
[58] St Mary's University College paragraph 84
[59] York St John University paragraphs 33,34, 29
[60] University of Buckinghamshire paragraph 41
[61] University of Derby paragraphs 42-43, 49
[62] The Arts University College Bournemouth paragraphs 24, 27, 30
[63] Conservatoire for Dance and Drama paragraph 25
[64] University of East London paragraphs 13-14
[65] Brunel University paragraphs 39,44

extensive use of external assessors also used such assessors as external examiners. The audit report indicated that this represented a conflict of interests that potentially compromised academic standards. It accordingly advised the institution to ensure that external examiners' moderating role was never compromised by direct participation in any element of assessment.[66]

36   One university's external examiner's reporting template failed to specify the national qualifications framework and other reference points for externals' comments, while the template's open nature elicited a variety of responses - some detailed, others markedly less so. There was no requirement for externals to sample across different centres of study when programmes were delivered at more than one location, and not all externals had been provided with complete profiles of students' marks and grades to enable them to judge how their sample scripts related to the whole set. The audit report concluded that this situation posed a potential threat to academic standards, and accordingly advised the university to review urgently the external examiner template and the information given to external examiners, to ensure clear reporting about the standards of all awards and programmes, wherever delivered.[67]

37   Another audit report indicated similar issues elsewhere: external examiners responded variably to the prompts on the report template, with a significant proportion of responses restricted to a single word, whereas the more evaluative replies in the section to be shared with students were of markedly more value. The audit report concluded that it would be desirable for the school to adapt its external examiner report form to elicit evaluative responses from all examiners,[68] and also advised it to ensure that relevant academic staff considered the reports, that the appropriate section was shared with students, and that all departments considered the reports within programme monitoring.[69] At one university the audit report commented on ambiguous guidance provided in the university's Code of Practice for External Examining of Taught Programmes of Study and the External Examiners' Handbook about the nature and extent of external examiner involvement in assessment at the various levels of the FHEQ. The report judged it desirable that the university reviewed the requirements for external examiner participation in assessment at all higher education undergraduate levels to secure further the academic standards of its awards.[70]

38   Timely and effective communication with externals was one theme of the recommendations. One specialist institute, where there was ample evidence of full consideration of issues raised by externals, was nonetheless advised to report formally to individual examiners on actions taken in response to their reports.[71] A university college, where there was less evidence that a specific issue identified externally had been addressed, was advised to make a thorough and timely response to external reports, and to ensure the accuracy and completeness of ensuing internal reports.[72] At another, university with a two-tier system of examination boards, the audit report identified variability in boards of studies' receipt of external examiners reports and recommended that the university ensured that all external examiners' reports were presented to the relevant board.[73]

39   Another, larger institution, where a minority of departments were dilatory in responding to visiting examiner reports, was recommended to establish a timescale for

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[66] Guildhall School of Music and Drama paragraph 22
[67] Canterbury Christchurch University paragraphs 45, 46 and 49
[68] London School of Economics paragraph 14
[69] London School of Economics paragraph 15
[70] University of Ulster paragraphs 66,67
[71] Courtauld Institute of Art paragraph 26
[72] St Mary's University College paragraph 65
[73] Liverpool John Moores University paragraphs 22-24

departments to make written responses that addressed issues raised in the reports.[74] At one university the audit report identified variability between faculties in their scrutiny of external examiners' reports and responses to these, and advised the university to ensure consistency in faculty procedures for the annual monitoring of programme reviews and of external examiners' reports and the associated responses to them.[75] At another university both annual monitoring by academic boards and (periodic) school review were based on summaries of external examiners' reports and responses prepared by the Examinations Office rather than the reports themselves, which were otherwise considered only within schools. The audit report concluded that potentially valuable information might have gone unrecognised, and considered it desirable for the university to extend the academic scrutiny of external examiner reports at institutional level.[76]

40   At a large institution the audit report indicated omissions in communicating with externals. These included: the absence of any institutional-level process for responding to external examiners about their reports and lack of knowledge about follow-up action in response to their reports; the unsatisfactory return rate for external examiners' reports. The audit report advised the college to develop its procedures for engaging with external examiners and their reports ensuring that all issues raised were addressed, and that responses were promptly communicated to external examiners.[77]

41   The audit report on a university that received a judgement of limited confidence for the current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards contained several recommendations relating to external examiners and their role. They included that the university implement arrangements enabling its Chief External Examiner to report on the overall effectiveness of its external examining system; that the university provide an opportunity for externals to comment on the nature and adequacy of responses made to the previous year's recommendations.[78]

The membership, conduct and reporting of examination boards to central bodies

42   In contrast to reports from previous audit cycles, there were few comments on the remit and operation of examination boards; those that were tended to focus on consistency of outcomes. Instances of good practice included the attendance of Registry staff at examination board meetings, so ensuring consistent practice across the School,[79] and, at another institution, mechanisms designed to ensure parity across the institution and consistency over time. These included past 'case law' summaries available to the college committee responsible for considering complex cases involving extenuating circumstances that might require a waiver of regulations.[80]

43   Examination board reporting attracted more recommendations, some on minuting and record keeping, others on clarifying reporting routes and responsibilities. A university was advised to review its current approach to summary reporting on academic standards to ensure that no significant issue was overlooked,[81] and a specialist institution to consider ways in which it could ensure that minutes across all school and course committees were a

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[74] Royal Holloway, University of London paragraph 25
[75] University of West London paragraph 24
[76] University of Nottingham paragraph 45
[77] King's College London paragraph 30
[78] York St John University paragraphs 15-17,29 and 76
[79] St Georges Hospital Medical School paragraph 69
[80] Royal Holloway College paragraph 33
[81] University of Bedfordshire paragraph 21

meaningful record of their discussions.[82] A university college was similarly advised to examine whether its approach to reporting was sufficiently detailed and precise enough to establish clearly the status of decisions taken and demonstrated assurance and oversight of learning and teaching at all levels in the institution.[83]

44   A specialist institution was advised to review its structures to ensure the effective management and discharge of its responsibilities for quality and standards[84] and another, larger institution advised to ensure that its Senate, or other relevant committee, was provided with sufficient information on external examiners' reports to discharge responsibility for the oversight of academic standards.[85]

45   Another university was advised to address the variation in practice across its faculties in implementing institutional policy, particularly in relation to the timeliness of feedback and return of assessed work.[86]

The clarity and consistency of institutional assessment policies and regulations

46   Several features of good practice included: a small specialist institution's innovative foundation degree[87] and the practical and scholarly support provided by another institution's assessment framework and taught provision manuals, and its assessment tariff scheme to ensure reasonable assessment loads and encourage consistency.[88] In a similar vein, another university's Academic Progression Initiative (API) and its Assessment Compact were being implemented at the time of the audit. API entailed restructuring undergraduate programmes to promote independent work and ensure clearer academic progression, with particular attention paid to internationalisation and assessment. Programme assessment strategies were aligned with the university's Assessment Compact which focused particularly on assessment load, feedback and timing. The audit report concluded that the university's structured implementation, support and monitoring of initiatives to improve assessment policies and practices constituted a feature of good practice.[89] However, handbooks with assessment regulations and information on the appeals process had sometimes been issued late, and the university was advised to ensure that all student handbooks provided complete and current information in accord with university regulations.[90]

47   Elsewhere an institution's summaries of past case law for ensuring parity across the institution and consistency over time when considering cases of student assessment that might require a waiver of regulations, were also judged a feature of good practice.[91] Another university's assessment handbook for academic staff provided detailed coverage of all aspects of assessment, from principles and strategies to security arrangements. It covered regulatory matters, arrangements for students with particular needs, and penalties for late submission of coursework in a style that sought to engage academic colleagues in the theory and practice of assessment. The report concluded that the comprehensiveness and collegial tone of the handbook was a feature of good practice, especially in its role in increasing consistency of practice across the institution.[92]

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[82] Norwich University College of the Arts paragraphs 40,45
[83] University College Plymouth St Mark & St John paragraph 86
[84] Guildhall School of Music and Drama paragraph 10
[85] Imperial College of Science and Technology paragraphs 42, 46
[86] London South Bank University paragraph 75,79, 102,104,107
[87] Heythrop College, University of London paragraph 90
[88] London Metropolitan University paragraphs 12,25
[89] Oxford Brookes University paragraphs 121,122
[90] Oxford Brookes University paragraph 160
[91] Royal Holloway University of London paragraph 33
[92] University of Ulster paragraph 65

48   While most universities and colleges had institution-wide assessment regulations, some permitted limited variability between subject areas. This led to a number of recommendations designed to promote greater clarity and consistency across the institution. They included: the need for a university to clarify the relationship between individual fields' interpretations of its 16-point marking scheme and its general requirements for the fulfilment of learning outcomes; and to clarify the regulations relating to students in borderline award categories so that these were observed consistently by staff and examiners.[93]   Another university had clear guidelines for internal and external moderating of assessment, but had not reviewed these against the revised *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*, resulting in inconsistency; it was accordingly advised to ensure a consistent approach to assessment across the range of its provision.[94] In similar vein another university was advised to review and clarify at university level the assessment regulations for each course, given variation in their availability, transparency and drafting.[95]

49   Another university, moving to a single set of academic awards with new assessment regulations governing all award-bearing programmes was advised, in advance of their introduction, to ensure that the quality of learning opportunities for continuing students was maintained, so enabling the university to decide in advance what action it would take rather than relying on retrospective examination board discretion.[96] Another university was also advised to review its regulations and policies for assessment to eliminate inconsistencies which, if not addressed, could potentially put academic standards at risk. In particular the audit report found there to be no clear university oversight of the provision for tutor reassessment, with consequent significant risk of inconsistent practice.[97]

50   At the time of its audit one university recognised three assessment schemes for honours and integrated master's degrees, although only one was used by the great majority of schools, and issues of marking range and degree classification distributions remained under review. The university had developed a more consistent institutional approach to assessment in recent years, but the report concluded that there was scope for further progress, and recommended that it expedited the planned harmonisation of its assessment practices.[98] A small specialist institution was also harmonising its assessment regulations across programmes, and there was potential to further embed consistency through assessment benchmarks and criteria for certain modules. Variation was permitted according to explicit criteria, but the audit report noted that there was a risk of confusion because variations were not collated in a single document. The institution was accordingly advised to continue to harmonise assessment regulations across its programmes by clarifying criteria for variations between programmes.[99]

51   Another university had introduced two Guided Independent Study weeks to give students the opportunity to reflect on the previous ten weeks of learning and consolidate their developing knowledge, insights and skills, before summative assessment for each module. However, inconsistencies in their introduction, the lack of purposeful activities for some students, reduced teaching and compressed times for assessment completion and practical work had led to difficulties. In light of this the university was advised to ensure that revised arrangements for Guided Independent Study consistently provided a positive and integrated learning experience for students.[100]

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[93] University of Bedfordshire paragraphs 41,42
[94] Buckinghamshire New University paragraph 57
[95] Cranfield University paragraph 47
[96] University of Gloucestershire paragraph 42
[97] University of Huddersfield paragraphs 55-58
[98] University of Nottingham paragraphs 54-58
[99] Ashridge paragraphs 63-69
[100] University of Westminster paragraphs 68,69

52   A large college had introduced a Common Awards Scheme that regularised assessment policies and practice across all programmes. At the time of the audit a review of the scheme was under consideration and discussions about the clarity and consistency of regulations on late submission, mitigating circumstances, capping for reassessment and double marking were still ongoing. The audit report recommended that the college resolved outstanding issues relating to the scheme.[101] Similarly, another institution was advised to conclude an extended internal debate on the process for considering extenuating circumstances relating to assessment and the granting of awards, and to implement a consistent approach across the institution based on clear and equitable criteria. It was also advised to revise its guidance to examination boards on their scope for discretion to ensure that the lower limit of the mark range within which discretion might be exercised was uniformly applied.[102]

53   At another large institution there was significant variability in the specification of assessment criteria, with some programmes and units well-defined but others markedly less so, with insufficient assessment detail and a lack of generic grade descriptors, but instead an alignment of degree grades to broad categories such as 'threshold' or 'very good'. Some programme and unit-level descriptors were comprehensive, with grading criteria clearly informed by relevant benchmarks and the FHEQ, but there were also instances in collaborative programmes of inadequate criteria. The report considered that achieving a consistent, robust approach to assessment criteria was too dependent on staff initiatives rather than by reference to a clear, regulated framework, and accordingly advised the university to establish comprehensive university-wide assessment criteria to help maintain consistent standards across all provision, both on and off-campus.[103]

54   A small specialist institution had specific assessment regulations for each programme to meet PSRB requirements, together with assessment regulations and procedures designed to ensure that academic standards were applied consistently across the college and its variety of programmes, modes of delivery and assessment. Nonetheless, the audit report advised the college to consider establishing a systematic institutional framework for assessment and awards that could be used to benchmark assessment across its various programmes, and to inform course approval panels.[104]

55   A university college was recommended to ensure comparable student support and consistent application of regulations, for example, in the granting of coursework extensions across all programmes.[105] A small specialist institution was recommended to reconcile various minor inconsistencies in award classification and student appeals, as applied in practice and in their student documentation, especially in relation to assessing performance.[106] A university college was recommended, in view of a general lack of clarity about procedures and responsibilities for notifying staff and students about changes to its Student Regulations Framework and the difficulty of accessing information, to keep under review the way in which material was presented in the Framework.[107] A long-established institution was advised to require the school to prescribe common assessment practices for all taught programmes, permitting variation only after consideration of an academic rationale and approval at school level.[108] Elsewhere, in light of considerable student uncertainty about the relationship between assessment and degree classifications, and variability in their

[101] Birkbeck University of London paragraphs 45, 46
[102] Queen Mary University of London paragraph 42, 43
[103] Manchester Metropolitan University paragraphs 25, 28, 50, 60, 144
[104] The College of Law paragraphs 40-42
[105] Newman University College paragraphs 127, 130
[106] Royal Northern College of Music paragraphs 30, 31
[107] University College Plymouth St Mark & St John paragraph 123
[108] University of London, School of Advanced Study paragraph 25, 26

awareness of programme changes, another university was recommended to review the effectiveness with which it communicated its assessment policies to students.[109]

56   A quarter of the institutions audited were recommended to provide additional support and training for postgraduate research students involved in teaching and/or assessment.[110] The great majority of recommendations for additional training were concentrated in 2009-10. Only three applied to institutions audited in 2010-11, suggesting that the sector overall recognised and was responsive to this issue.

Assessment of different modes of study

57   The audit reports revealed a range and variety of initiatives in this area, many of them centred around projects in e-learning and/or blended learning. Features of good practice included the quality of the virtual learning environment (VLE) for the delivery of learning and student support for a master's programme at a small specialist institution. The institution provided assessment briefings for students through webinars and a discussion forum for each assignment. The programme coordinator monitored student interactions and referred them to the relevant module leader if intervention was required. All students were required to reflect on the assessment process within their learning blogs, providing a mechanism for monitoring authenticity. The institution's online/distance-learning programmes that included examinations overseas required students to attend British Council offices to complete the assessments, with practice papers provided online.[111]

58   A specialist college had made significant investment in its VLE platform for the online delivery of course content through videocasts (iTutorials) and for feedback to students on their progress (multiple choice 'test and feedback' tasks), with the technology supporting student learning effectively.[112] Another institution which had a small number of flexible and distributed learning programmes, devoted consideration given to the way in which assessment tended to differ from classroom-based provision. The audit report judged that the institution's review process paid appropriate separate attention to this provision.[113]

59   A small college, where communication was the most significant issue of concern for students, also considered its VLE increasingly important for, among other things, assessment submission, tracking of submission and marks return, online marking and feedback, and for making appointments for tutorials. Electronic access to such information was considered particularly important in light of the significant proportion of part-time staff and students, while online assessment submission facilitated use of plagiarism detection software. The same institution had also initiated pedagogy lunches, enabling staff, including visiting staff and assistants, to discuss developments and good pedagogic practice in more diversified learning, teaching and assessment strategies, with some external input. There had been specific sessions to support the successful completion of a 'levelisation' project, and input from the Higher Education Academy subject centre.[114]

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[109] York St John University paragraphs 39, 90
[110] The University of Bedfordshire paragraph 120; Birkbeck University of London paragraph 84; Buckinghamshire New University paragraph 172; Canterbury Christ Church University paragraphs 10,181; University of Chester paragraph 175; University of Derby paragraph 160; University of East London paragraphs 54,91; University of Huddersfield paragraph 185; Liverpool John Moores University paragraph 155; Oxford Brookes University paragraphs 111, 173; Queen Mary, University of London paragraph 87; University of Teesside paragraph 153; University of Westminster paragraph 132; Writtle College paragraph 153
[111] Ashridge paragraph 106, 93
[112] College of Law paragraphs 97, 79, 80, 88
[113] Birkbeck University of London paragraph 67
[114] Heythrop College London University paragraphs 98,123

60   A different university was approaching e-learning by promoting staff skills through specific training and annual events. The university had participated in National e-Learning Benchmarking Programmes and been awarded an HEA Pathfinder project. Outputs from the project included two briefing papers on e-assessment, while its evaluation highlighted insufficient systematic dissemination of existing good practice across faculties, concluding that there was a need to embed e-learning across the institution rather than relying on enthusiasts working alone. In response, staff were offered hands-on sessions on technical and pedagogic aspects of e-learning, and at the time of the audit the university was involved in a Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC)funded project with four other UK universities focusing on using technology to support curriculum development.[115]

61   A university college had implemented new Undergraduate and Postgraduate Frameworks to improve the student experience through a reduced assessment load, a more coordinated approach to submission and assessment deadlines, greater potential for collaboration between programmes and students, and a structure suitable for both part-time and full-time students. The inclusion of further subjects within the Undergraduate Framework was being considered, and there was continuing development of the VLE and the estate in response to changes in the student population and their academic and social needs.[116]

62   A university viewed e-learning as an integral feature of its development of learning, teaching and assessment. Its VLE, introduced in 2001, was now mainstream with over 28,000 students enrolled on one or more courses via the VLE. The university ensured that arrangements for learner support, including security of and feedback on assessment, were appropriate through an additional validation component that applied specifically to distance learning courses.[117] Another university was participating in a JISC–funded project designed to develop the use and effectiveness of digitally supported patchwork text assessments in a range of traditional academic subjects within several HEIs.[118]

63   Reflecting its intent to operate in a more strategic way, another institution had formed an e-learning steering group to oversee activities related to e-learning, including online assessment and feedback, Blackboard, and e-portfolios. E-learning tools to which the university was committed included Turning Point, which allowed multiple choice questions to be answered during a lecture, and ReCap, a process for electronic recording of teaching sessions. The online assessment and feedback project aimed to provide a framework for a consistent and robust approach to e-assessment. ReCap was welcomed by students, although use was limited by the number of lecture rooms that had been equipped for recording. The audit report indicated evidence that some staff were resistant to these new technologies and heard of staff concerns that ReCap use might lead to poor attendance at lectures. The team recommended that the university extended, as widely as possible, opportunities for students to benefit from its investment in learning technology.[119]

The provision of management information relating to students' academic performance, and the use made of such data

64   There were several examples of good practice in the provision and use of management information data relating to students' academic performance, progression and achievement. They included: one university's use of WebHUB to provide detailed information on progression, retention and student satisfaction, and its use for analysis and decision-making, particularly in programme monitoring and review, and in managing and enhancing

[115] London South Bank University paragraph 87
[116] Norwich University College of the Arts paragraph 113
[117] Sheffield Hallam University paragraph 62
[118] University of Cumbria paragraph 118
[119] University of Newcastle paragraphs 68, 69

the quality of learning opportunities.[120] Another university used management information such as attendance and assignment submission data to target student support.[121] A small specialist institution with most of its students taking short courses, had developed in-year monitoring data to assess speedily the impact of curricula, teaching or assessment changes on students.[122] Another, large institution was improving the relevance of its management information and providing students' personal academic advisers with more data to track attendance, engagement and achievement and so identify and support students at academic risk.[123] Two smaller institutions were also cited as exemplars: at one specialist college the staff's active engagement with management data and the ways in which it was used to inform planning and decision making was judged to be good practice.[124] In contrast, the audit report indicated that a university college's staff made variable use of management information at programme level, but that institutional-level practice was more consistent. In particular, the Principal's Dashboard initiative, available to senior staff, provided easy access to key management data and college indicators. It promoted a strategic approach to data analysis, strengthened the evidential base for decision-making, contributed to enhancement and so was a feature of good practice.[125]

65   There were also many recommendations for further development of management information and for its strategic use to secure standards. They included: the desirability of a university improving the consistency, collection and use of the course level data which informed its annual monitoring process[126] and the need for a long established institution to rectify the absence of data on a wide range of student variables which potentially prevented it from assuring itself of the comparability of its academic standards or the quality of its learning opportunities. The report also advised the college to ensure the systematic collection, analysis, dissemination and use of student data and feedback.[127] By contrast, staff at another institution that collected a range of data were unfamiliar with the information available, and the college was recommended to strengthen its availability to staff concerned with quality enhancement.[128]

66   There were instances where audit reports indicated that while institutional level collection and use of management information was appropriate and effective, the use and analysis of such data at programme and school levels was variable. In two cases there were recommendations that the universities continued to monitor data use by programmes and schools.[129] At a third university staff reported difficulties in interpreting the annual monitoring data spreadsheets. Given the importance attached to the use of key performance indicators in annual monitoring, the university was recommended to expedite its presentation of management information in a more easily accessible form.[130] At another institution the need in some cases to locally supplement centrally produced data, its sometimes contested nature, and questions over the effectiveness of the exception reporting process led the audit report to recommend that the university reviewed the ways in which management information/data was flagged and used to inform annual programme monitoring.[131]

67   By contrast, another university produced detailed module and field data but programme retention data was not routinely available so that the audit report concluded that

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[120] Liverpool John Moores University paragraph 36
[121] University of Derby paragraph 118
[122] College of Law paragraph 46
[123] London Metropolitan University paragraphs 48, 57
[124] Norwich University College of the Arts paragraph 65
[125] St Mary's University College paragraphs 26, 27
[126] New University of Buckinghamshire paragraph 62
[127] Kings College London paragraph 45
[128] Imperial College of Science and Technology paragraph 97
[129] University of Derby paragraphs 72-74; University of Teesside paragraph 41
[130] University of Westminster paragraph 60
[131] Northumbria University at Newcastle paragraph 53

the university could not readily and systematically identify programme-specific issues affecting student achievement. Overall, the report judged the university's use of management information to assure academic standards to be limited, and advised it to strengthen the analysis and use of data on student retention and achievement at programme level.[132] Another university had spent some time reviewing its use of management information and in developing a more complete data set; the audit report concluded that statistical information made only a limited contribution to the institution's assurance of academic standards and strongly encouraged it to expedite progress in developing the new data set.[133] At a fourth university that did not routinely produce aggregated student achievement data at institutional level, the audit report judged there to be benefit in considering indicators of student admissions, progression and exit performance across the institution, and recommended the use of such statistics to inform strategy and policy.[134]

68   Similarly, at one university college detailed academic performance data was available at programme level, but was not routinely aggregated for use at school or institutional levels, a situation the audit report viewed as a potential weakness in the annual monitoring process. The report indicated support for the institution's intention to reintroduce aggregated data, and recommended that it regularly review this in considering academic performance at institutional level.[135]

69   A small specialist institution provided its affiliates with data sets to compare levels, programmes and institutions, but little use was made of the data sets. The institution also compiled an annual digest of award data, including degree classification data for a small number of comparator institutions. The digest's value for analysis and interpretation of progression, retention and award statistics was limited, and the audit report recommended that the conservatoire improved its analysis and use of management information to ensure important issues were identified and acted upon.[136]

70   Another institution had not received appropriate management data on student academic performance for two years before the audit, and the most recent annual report of the School of Advanced Study lacked any analysis of student numbers, pass rates, admissions, withdrawals, or other quality-related data. In view of this the audit report advised the university to require the school to use student management information, as a matter of routine, in assuring itself of the quality and academic standards of taught and research degrees.[137]

71   At the time of its audit another institution was developing a broader quantitative data set for periodic review. The audit report outlined clear evidence of statistical information being used effectively to inform internal monitoring and review, but the school lacked any transparent mechanism for reliably and systematically assuring itself that was happening. In view of this situation the audit report advised the institution to develop further its use of management information to support the evaluation of award standards and the quality of learning opportunities.[138] Elsewhere, a university college was recommended to enhance its use of management information across its institutional reporting processes in light of the inconsistency of overview issues raised by external examiners and by statistics.[139]

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[132] University of East London paragraphs 29, 30
[133] Brunel University paragraph 70
[134] Cranfield University paragraph 49
[135] Bishop Grosseteste University College, Lincoln paragraphs 67, 68
[136] Royal Conservatoire for Dance & Drama paragraphs 34-36
[137] University of London, School of Advanced Study paragraph 28
[138] London School of Economics and Political Science paragraphs 24, 40
[139] Newman University College paragraphs 60, 76

72   As with reports in 2006-09, all kinds of higher education institution are represented among those with recommendations for the more effective compilation, deployment and use of student data for managing academic standards and learning opportunities, and the findings broadly confirm the conclusion based on the 2006-09 reports of a significant sector-wide issue. However, there are fewer indications among the 2009-11 reports of institutions with outmoded systems or ones that lacked functionality. Rather, concerns centred around the less than fully effective use made of available management information because of inappropriate committee remits, failure to interrogate the data optimally, or a lack of corresponding approaches to data analysis at differing levels within the institution. In some cases data recorded were comprehensive and institution-level analyses appropriate, but this is not reflected at programme or field levels. However, in other instances the problem appears to be a central one, with inadequate analysis and lack of a strategic approach to the use of management information on student performance data at all institutional levels.

Feedback on assessment

73   Successive NSS findings, as well as many internal institutional surveys, have revealed widespread student dissatisfaction with the timeliness, quality, consistency and regularity of academic feedback on their assessed work. Such concerns were reflected in several Student Written Submissions and in a number of the audit reports. However, not all accounts were critical: the audit report at one specialist college indicated that feedback on assessed work by academic staff was thorough and explained with reference to the assessment criteria. There were numerous opportunities for students to discuss assessment performance with members of staff and the institution's relatively small size facilitated easy student access to staff to discuss any academic issue. Students were also split into 'learning support groups' which enabled support and development throughout the year by fellow students.[140] At another institution students who met the audit team were confident that they knew who to go to if they had a problem with their course. Although the SWS drew attention to variable adherence to the 20 working days' turnaround time for feedback in submitted work, students at the audit visit reported that, in the main, they received feedback when indicated, and the feedback was detailed and useful. There were action points for faculties in regard to what students could expect in terms of assessment feedback, and a resource pack on good practice in assessment was in place at the time of the audit visit.[141]

74   A university college had recently taken steps to address issues raised about assessment, and had held a series of staff workshops on giving effective feedback to students, and understanding its Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students.[142] In addition to NSS and other external student surveys, a university had instituted its own internal 'NSS' to survey non-final year students, and a subgroup of its Learning and Teaching Committee had looked at assessment feedback and greater emphasis on teaching and academic practice.[143] A university's institutional enhancement approach had variable outcomes: feedback on assessed work in particular was much criticised in the student written submission and some students who met the audit team did not feel the personal tutoring system was effective. In contrast, explicit inclusion of employability in the curriculum had added to students' learning experience and was judged by the team to be a feature of good practice.[144] At another new university student representatives raised matters such as assessment feedback on relevant committees, where they had been able to change university policy regarding the time taken to receive feedback.[145]

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[140] Ashridge paragraph 113
[141] Birmingham City University paragraph 98
[142] Bishop Grosseteste University College paragraphs 87, 136
[143] Brunel University paragraph 86
[144] Buckinghamshire New University paragraphs 112, 116
[145] Canterbury Christchurch University paragraph 85

75   Another university had a policy of a 20-working-day turnaround to produce written feedback on coursework, but this was not being met consistently. The issue had been recognised by the university as problematic, and was being acted on and monitored as part of the ongoing Learning and Teaching Strategy.[146] A university college's audit revealed a similar picture: the assessment process was supported by a range of templates, detailed operational guidance and examples of good practice, all intended to achieve consistent standards within a scheme where individual modules contributed to several courses. Students confirmed that assignment briefs and criteria were clear and issued with accompanying staff guidance. In general, students were positive about the information they received on assessment through course handbooks, while module schemes of work assisted in workload planning and time management. There were comments made by students about variability in the quality and speed of feedback on assessment, but also general acknowledgement that improvements were being made. For example, the institution was piloting a new fast feedback system providing marks after two weeks, and full feedback after four weeks.[147]

76   A university's Student Representatives' Conferences addressed assessment and feedback, while student evaluation and analysis of student questionnaire feedback was a required element of annual evaluation. Appraisal of annual evaluation analysis and thematic review of student analysis, feedback and assessment both identified a lack of consistency between schools in relation to annual evaluation, indicating that further work was possibly needed, which the audit report encouraged the university to undertake.[148]

77   A large institution had identified from surveys and staff-student committee discussion that arrangements for assessment feedback were problematic, and had taken several initiatives to improve matters. These included establishing the post of Dean of Learning and Teaching, with particular responsibility for the quality and timeliness of information provided to students. Students highlighted improvements in the timeliness of feedback in certain departments while at college level a good practice guide was to be developed for distribution to departments. The efficacy of these arrangements was to be monitored and reports provided to the Student Academic Experience Working Party. The audit report concluded that the use and impact of student feedback to improve the student learning experience was variable across departments, and considered that the college would derive greatest benefit from survey information regarding the student experience if it could strengthen the availability of that information to all involved in discussing quality enhancement.[149]

78   At another university some students who met the audit team had wanted clearer assessment criteria and had reported various difficulties including delays in the return of assessed work. These experiences corroborated findings in the SWS that assessment feedback was an issue for students in terms of timing and quality. The report welcomed the university's paper on Threshold Standards for Student Experience and advised that it be strengthened by making it absolutely clear what would be mandatory for all staff and students, and by ensuring compliance across the university.[150]

79   A small specialist institution compared its NSS performance with that of other specialist conservatoires, while also focusing attention on weaker areas, or where there had been deterioration from the previous year, and developed an action plan. It also initiated a project concerned with feedback to students on assessment within its new Learning &

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[146] Cranfield University paragraphs 48, 57
[147] Harper Adams University College paragraphs 37, 38
[148] University of Huddersfield paragraphs 76, 80
[149] Imperial College of Science & Technology paragraphs 61, 95, 97
[150] Manchester Metropolitan University paragraphs 101,102, 105, 173

Teaching Strategy.[151] A university college selected assessment as its annual enhancement theme for 2009-10. It was discussed at all institutional levels, and dealt with both formally (in reports and policy proposals) and informally (in programme-level discussions and debates) some of which produced innovative suggestions such as assessment feedback on MP3 players and introducing different-sized modules to reduce assessment bunching. Topics covered included: the variety of assessment methods; feedback; arrangements for personal development planning and deadlines for the return of assessed work. The exercise generated widespread discussion and triggered changes in policy and practice, so that the audit report identified the university college's promotion of selected enhancement themes, which encouraged discussion and change at programme level, as a feature of good practice.[152]

80   Despite one large university's introduction, in 2008, of a revised assessment and feedback policy intended to address student concerns about timeliness and usefulness of feedback on assessed work, student views in the SWS, in the NSS and during meetings with the audit team, pointed to continuing variable practice in the quantity, timeliness, legibility and usefulness of assessment feedback. Improvements had included a requirement to publish a three to four week return deadline for feedback to students and increased use of the VLE to provide that feedback. Some faculties used electronic monitoring systems to regulate the timely return of feedback on coursework, the most efficient of which issued automated reminders to academic staff. Electronic monitoring of staff provision of feedback had been developed and implemented on a faculty basis. While the audit team heard that monitoring was strong in some faculties, it found that institutional oversight was limited and that practice was inconsistent.[153]

81   In addition to its Learning & Teaching Institute responsible for promoting e-learning and contributing to quality enhancement for learning, teaching and assessment, a large university had established an Institutional Research Team (IRT) to provide longitudinal and strategically focused evidence to improve the transition of students into the institution, their experience of higher education and their employability. The SWS highlighted work that the IRT had undertaken in partnership with the Students' Union on feedback; the latter believed that the Technology, Feedback, Action! campaign which explored the potential of technology-enabled feedback, had been successful in promoting dialogue about feedback between staff and students at all levels in the university. The audit report considered the use of the Institutional Research Team to inform institutional practice at strategic and operational levels to be a feature of good practice.[154]

82   In contrast, another university's students expressed dissatisfaction with the timeliness of feedback on assessed work, which they noted did not aid their ongoing development as it was often returned too late to inform their next piece of work. The university had a programme of workshops to develop a consistent assessment feedback policy and the audit report encouraged the university to accelerate its work on this. The audit report concluded that there was no clear institutional-level system for managing assessment practice, including feedback to students. The report accordingly advised the university to address these concerns and develop further its assessment policy to specify the requirements and expectations for timely and structured feedback to students on assessed work. The university's Teaching and Learning staff development for 2009-10 included the latest facilitation, assessment techniques and alternative approaches to student feedback.[155]

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[151] Royal Northern College of Music paragraph 40
[152] St Mary's University College paragraph 59
[153] Sheffield Hallam University paragraph 43
[154] Sheffield Hallam University paragraph 82
[155] Staffordshire University paragraph 103, 122

83   At another university students had concerns about inconsistencies in the timeliness and quality of assessment feedback, although the NSS results were better than the sector average in this area. The timeliness of returned work was an issue, since not all tutors complied with the 25 days required. A second issue related to the helpfulness of the feedback, because, although there was an institutional template for assignment feedback, some feedback was perceived to be excessively brief, to use comments used in other feedback, or to use plagiarism detection software inappropriately as a vehicle for feedback. The university provided staff guidance on these matters.[156] Another institution's students also expressed the view that they wished for improved feedback on their performance, a greater range of assessment methods and an improvement in their engagement with the university.[157]

84   One university, responding to low scores in assessment and feedback in the NSS and the university's own satisfaction survey, produced new guidance on minimum levels of feedback and provided an optional feedback template which, in the university's view contributed to improved NSS scores.[158] Another university had also responded positively to significant student concerns over feedback on assessed work by reviewing this area and introducing new procedures to improve the speed and quality of feedback. The audit report indicated evidence that the new process was working well and that when student submissions were, exceptionally, returned outside the newly implemented 15-day timescale clear advance warnings, and an accompanying rationale, were given to students. There had been a positive response from the student body, and improvements in the overall satisfaction rate on assessment feedback on the majority of programmes.[159] Similarly, a university college had produced action plans to address long standing concerns over the timeliness of assessment feedback. There had been a year-on-year improvement in this aspect and, in spite of some concerns evident in the SWS, students whom the audit team met expressed satisfaction that the issue had now been largely resolved; some students praised the timeliness and quality of their formative feedback.[160]

85   Another institution had introduced peer observation of assessment and feedback as part of the process of addressing concerns over relatively low scores in the NSS and other surveys in some areas of the university.[161] One university used NSS results and data systematically to enhance learning opportunities through promulgating good practice on assessment and other issues. The university had recorded high levels of satisfaction in NSS scores with particular strengths in learning, teaching and resources, while continuing to improve its performance in assessment and feedback, and in organisation and management.[162] Another university responded to low NSS scores on assessment feedback by requiring faculties to report on how they planned to address issues of quality and timeliness of feedback to students. It also accepted faculty plans for action on this topic. A Centre for Higher Education Practice (CHEP) project on assessment and feedback was to be progressed within the university, drawing on existing practice, internally and externally, with a view to reporting by September 2010.[163]

Academic integrity

86   Plagiarism and other aspects of academic malpractice constitute a set of issues that have become more pronounced in institutional thinking in recent years, and many

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[156] University of Cumbria paragraph 100
[157] University of London international Programme paragraph 133
[158] University of Nottingham paragraph 67
[159] University of West London paragraph 38
[160] Writtle University College paragraphs 46,72
[161] University of Plymouth paragraph 70
[162] University of Teesside paragraphs 48,51
[163] University of Ulster paragraph 83

universities and colleges had reviewed and clarified their regulations in this area.[164] In many instances the institution's Virtual Learning Environment was being used to publicise information about plagiarism, collaboration and collusion, the relevant regulations and supportive guidance and materials.[165] This was prompted not only by considerations of accessibility for students both on and off-campus, but also because electronic submission of assessed work allowed the use of detection software.[166] A new university's use of plagiarism-avoidance software on its VLE both as a formative aid to develop good academic practice and for the submission of coursework was judged a feature of good practice.[167] Another new university, having had a policy that students submit three pieces of work through its plagiarism detection software during each year of their course, had now moved to making the software available to students as a formative learning enhancement tool. The university library had also invested in a computer-aided instruction system that provided varied learning tools that helped students better appreciate the difference between collaboration and collusion, and which promoted students' referencing skills.[168]

87   Another university had creatively addressed students' academic difficulties such as poor referencing skills through use of a quiz, supported by a common approach set out in its Academic Integrity Policy.[169] One institution had introduced several initiatives to counter plagiarism including, in conjunction with the Students' Union, a Plagiarism Awareness Week,[170] while another had supplemented its policy with implementation materials, on the premise that the prevention of plagiarism should engage staff as much as students.[171] Following recommendations from a review of assessment irregularities, a large university had developed a new online resource, Right-Cite, to promote students' understanding of good academic conduct, particularly with regard to plagiarism and collusion, providing an online tutorial and actual case studies as well as general guidance. The university had also established a Writing Development Centre to promote good practice and enable students to develop their academic writing skills in a supportive environment. Key priorities were to support students in the transition from secondary to higher education and from undergraduate to postgraduate study. The Centre provided tuition, guidance and advice on all aspects of academic writing, both online and through individual or group sessions. Students held these facilities in high regard, whilst also taking the view that greater awareness of their availability could be promoted.[172]

88   Another institution's response to its previous audit had included further embedding good practice in identifying plagiarism through more systematic data collection for staff and

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[164] For example: Birkbeck College London paragraph 49;[164] Bishop Grosseteste University College paragraph 60 Canterbury Christ Church University paragraphs 57,58, 103; Courtauld Institute of Art paragraph 33; Institute of Education paragraphs 41,47; Newman University College paragraph 70; Oxford Brookes University paragraphs 55,107; Sheffield Hallam University paragraph 44; University of Bedfordshire paragraph 40; University of London, International Programme 86; University of Plymouth paragraph 59
[164] University of Teesside paragraph 39; [164] University of Worcester paragraph 48;[164] Writtle University College paragraph 83
[165] Canterbury Christ Church University paragraphs 57, 58, 103; Edge Hill University paragraph 85; Heythrop College London paragraph 98; Liverpool John Moores University paragraph 86; London South Bank University paragraph 51; Oxford Brookes University paragraphs 55, 107; Royal Holloway University of London paragraphs 32, 65; Sheffield Hallam University paragraph 44; University of Bedfordshire paragraph 40; University of Derby paragraphs 62, 114, 118; University of Northumbria at Newcastle paragraphs 11, 12, 49
[166] Edge Hill University paragraph 85; Heythrop College London paragraph 98; Liverpool John Moores University paragraph 86; Oxford Brookes University paragraphs 55, 107; Royal Holloway University of London paragraphs 32, 65; University of Bedfordshire paragraph 40; University of Derby paragraphs 62, 114, 118; University of Cumbria paragraph 100; University of Newcastle paragraph 90; University of Northumbria at Newcastle paragraphs 11, 12, 49; University of Ulster paragraphs 71-73, 134
[167] Edge Hill University paragraph 85
[168] Oxford Brookes University paragraphs 55, 107
[169] University of East London paragraph 60
[170] Kingston University paragraph 46
[171] University of Derby paragraphs 62, 114, 118
[172] University of Newcastle paragraph 90

student development, followed by improved recording mechanisms in schools and more targeted advice and support. This included the roll out of plagiarism detection software, emphasising its role as a diagnostic tool. These developments were part of wider initiatives to promote good practice in countering plagiarism by requiring schools to report annually: by updating Good Assessment Practice Guidelines on assignment design to avoid plagiarism; extending the formative use of the software and establishing an Academic Misconduct Task Group to review regulations and practices.[173]

89   There were also a small number of recommendations relating specifically to plagiarism: a specialist institution's plagiarism regulations had not been formally approved by its Academic Board, and its category of 'minor plagiarism' requiring students to resubmit corrected work capped at the pass mark was not included in student handbooks. There was also a lack of clarity for considering mitigating circumstances, and the institution was advised to define, implement consistently, and communicate clearly to staff and students policies and procedures relating to plagiarism and extenuating circumstances.[174]

90   One university had established a graded series of plagiarism penalties reflecting the number of offences identified, with the first offence involving formative advice within a policy allowing scope for academic judgement over whether a student had referenced poorly rather than having committed plagiarism. Detection software was not routinely used in all courses, except research degree programmes. Undergraduate penalties were not related to the student's level of work and were dealt with locally, except for offences which would result in exclusion from the university. The audit report and advised the university to ensure that cases of plagiarism were consistently identified and recorded in order to monitor the success of its policy and to maintain the academic standards of its awards.[175]

Trends

91   Findings from these audit reports generally accord with those in 2006-09; indeed, given the number and broadly representative nature of the two sets of included institutions, it would be surprising if they did not. Comparison of the present findings with those summarised in the corresponding Series 1 and Series 2 *Outcomes* papers reveals several developments over the period from 2004. Some of these represent incremental changes, others more significant shifts. The present reports indicate most institutions' now detailed familiarity with the Academic Infrastructure – in particular the FHEQ and relevant sections of the *Code of practice* - and their application to the design of programme specifications containing intended learning outcomes and associated assessment. During earlier audit cycles the drafting of detailed programme specifications was still work in progress but the present reports provide, in the very great majority of cases, evidence of clear institutional recognition of their relevance for programme design, including assessment.

92   One reflection of this trend is an absence of instances of institutional good practice cited in relation to the Academic Infrastructure coupled with fewer recommendations for improvement in this area compared with the earlier cohort. Alignment with the Infrastructure is now regarded as appropriate, not exceptional, practice, and the great majority of institutions engage effectively with its provisions.[176] Another reflection of this state of affairs is the near ubiquity of institutional assessment policies and regulations rather than local – faculty, school or department – ones. Both earlier *Outcomes* series commented on variability of assessment regimes and classification frameworks within institutions, and the sometimes

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[173] University of Northumbria at Newcastle paragraphs 11, 12, 49
[174] Courtauld Institute of Art paragraph 33
[175] University of Ulster paragraphs 71-73, 134
[176] As indicated earlier the Academic Infrastructure has been migrated into the UK Quality Code for Higher Education with individual chapters being revised during 2012-13

extensive and inconsistent use of discretion by examining boards. While not entirely absent, these are notably less prominent themes in the present cycle, with the current reports representing a further diminution compared with the earlier reports.

93   In parallel with these changes, many institutions have also revised the composition, remits and reporting arrangements for their examining boards to reflect greater transparency and institutional accountability. Besides the *Code of practice*, other stimuli promoting such changes include the resource and reputational implications of student progression and achievement data, NSS outcomes and the growing influence of league tables. The audit reports reveal concerns with aspects of some individual institutional arrangements - particularly over consistency of process and outcomes, adequate minuting and recording of decisions and, in a few cases, the need for clarity in the responsibility for oversight above the level of individual examination boards. But the reports also indicate that most institutions have robust assessment procedures.

94   External examiners are crucial in securing rigour and standards. Some reports express concern over institutional consistency relating to external examiners – in their appointment and induction for example, and also in the detailed consideration and speed of response to their recommendations. Externals' reports are typically considered during, or in addition to, annual monitoring. While most institutions have robust annual processes, there are instances in some reports where significant improvements in monitoring need to be effected in particular areas, again often with a need for institutional clarity.

95   The recent audit reports indicate a wide variety of imaginative projects in e-learning and blended learning at all levels, made feasible by improved IT systems and effective VLE provision, accessible to students irrespective of study mode or whether on- or off- campus. Such provision is also often also available to, and supportive of, students on collaborative programmes.

96   Enhanced IT capacity also offers the prospect of more detailed and timely data on student retention, progression and achievement for consideration by examination boards and higher level bodies although some universities and colleges had not fully exploited this. In contrast to earlier audit cycles and reports in 2006-09, few concerns were expressed about the capabilities of institutional IT systems; rather the problem seems largely to result from not making full and appropriate use of the information potentially available. Despite technical advances and greater affordability, in this respect some institutions appear to have made little progress since the last audit cycle in their strategic use of management information to monitor standards and inform policy development.

97   Another aspect where progress has been slow was in providing feedback on assessment to students. Some institutions had introduced policies or statements of entitlement for students, setting out minimum expectations for feedback. However, reports indicate that compliance could be patchy, both in terms of turnaround and in the quality of feedback, with implementation and monitoring problematic for some institutions. Again, local academic cultures may well be a significant influence here.

98   Both sets of reports indicate that awareness of plagiarism and the need for regulations, policies and educational initiatives to counter it are much more at the forefront of many institutions' thinking than in earlier audit cycles. A positive feature of many reports was of initiatives, often in association with the Students' Union, to educate students in good scholarly practice with regard to referencing, citation, and so on, which they much appreciated.

Conclusions

99   The audit reports that form the basis for this paper indicate that, with very few exceptions, institutions have robust processes involving significant externality for assuring the quality and standards of their programmes. The Academic Infrastructure is well established as the framework for designing and calibrating higher education provision, is familiar to institutions, and has been especially influential in prompting them to explicate programme learning outcomes and associated assessment.

100   Programme approval and periodic review are effective processes for evaluating programme design, including assessment. Annual monitoring and review can be less effective, and audit reports make recommendations for improving the process, including the input of external examiners. In some cases institutional oversight needs to be strengthened to demonstrate effective local review of programme and sub-programme assessment. Institutions need to have processes to guard against major programme changes inadvertently resulting from accrued unmonitored minor changes. Apart from specific cases, programme specifications are near universal and besides providing a design and regulatory framework also serve as a source of course information. They typically incorporate learning outcomes together with matching assessment, although in some cases generic learning outcomes and assessment need to be replaced by subject specific ones, and module/course unit outcomes need to be consistent with those for the programme overall. In their engagement with the Academic Infrastructure institutions have consolidated and built on the progress made in the previous two cycles of institutional audit.

101   External examiners play a key role in securing standards, and most institutions have correspondingly thorough arrangements for their appointment, induction and training, usually involving dual school/department and institutional components. In some cases, in an attempt to promote local ownership of assessment, universities have devolved externals' appointment and induction to schools or departments, but this runs the risk of inconsistent and sometimes inadequate practice. Some institutions appointed Chief External Examiners and in a few cases their roles and responsibilities needed clarification. The great majority of institutions use their external examiner expertise robustly and effectively for subject assessment purposes. Some reports noted effective institutional mechanisms for considering external examiners reports and identifying generic issues, but in other cases there were recommendations for improvements to encourage more thorough reflection and to promote a more strategic institutional approach to standards and assessment.

102   Many institutions operate a two-tier structure (modules/units and programmes) for examination boards, often with different quoracy, chairing and reporting arrangements, although externals are usually present on both. The remit, conduct and reporting of examination boards provided several instances of good practice, but also some recommendations for action. They included issues of quoracy, attendance and breadth of academic input, confidentiality and consistency in dealing with mitigating circumstances, and a need for externality on any senior body overriding examination board recommendations. Several reports noted variability in assessment procedures and practice by boards, including alternative classification schemes, local interpretation of re-sit eligibility, and variation in the exercise of discretion, but this was much less marked than in previous audit cycles. Most institutions have moved to a common assessment framework for the great majority of their degree programmes and institutional, as opposed to disciplinary or subject determination of assessment schemes, is much more evident than hitherto.

103   Several institutions had introduced effective student record systems which informed the business of examination boards and relevant central bodies, and others had constructive and realistic plans to augment their student database. However, there were also many

recommendations for improved systems and/or more effective use of existing data on student retention, progression and achievement for assessment boards and for central monitoring and review. There was noticeably less reference in later audits to inadequate IT functionality, pointing instead to a lack of awareness by some institutions of the potential for student data to inform aspects of monitoring and strategic planning. Recommendations for improvements here applied to representatives of all kinds of institution, suggesting this to be a sector-wide issue.

104   The provision of timely, informative assessment feedback to students also remains a significant issue for the sector. Many institutions have introduced policies or statements of student entitlement with minimum expected standards, but monitoring these and ensuring compliance often remains problematic. The impression is that inconsistency within institutions in providing feedback, which may reflect subject-based cultures, is a particular source of student dissatisfaction. There is increased awareness of plagiarism, and many institutions have sought to counter this through a combination of policy and regulation, together with welcome educational initiatives to promote students' good academic practice.

105   Given current and impending changes in UK higher education, the rigour and assurance of academic standards, and so of assessment, is likely to remain under scrutiny within and beyond the sector. On the basis of the audit reports reviewed here most universities and colleges are well placed to face many of the resulting challenges. However, some other issues, such as a more strategic institutional approach to standards, more effective use of student data to inform institutional thinking, the provision of speedy and informative assessment feedback and the countering of academic malpractice are likely to be concern for the sector generally, and to pose significant challenges for some institutions.

Appendix A: Features of good practice relating to assessment and feedback

- the involvement of external consultants, students and employers in the curriculum development stage of the validation process (Buckinghamshire New University paragraph 29)
- the use of the virtual learning environment in supporting students and staff, and its potential for promoting comparable learning experiences across the University's collaborative partnerships (Canterbury Christ Church University paragraphs 103-104, 158)
- the formulation of level descriptors as a tool for curriculum development (Conservatoire for Dance & Drama paragraph 17)
- the work of the External Examiner Sub-Committee and development of the database of external examiners (University of Derby paragraph 57)
- the use of management information such as attendance and assignment submission data to target student support (University of Derby paragraph 126)
- the integrated and comprehensive nature of annual monitoring and review (Edge Hill University paragraphs 28,61
- the contribution of SOLSTICE fellows to the development of technology-enhanced learning across the University (Edge Hill University paragraphs 85, 86, 125)
- the active involvement of employers and other professional advisers in planning and developing the curriculum and in devising approaches for its effective delivery (Harper Adams University College paragraphs 24; 30; 33; 46)
- the opportunities provided by the programme approval process for the early systematic review of new programmes (Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine paragraph 31)
- the early and prolonged engagement of external advisers in the development of proposed programmes of study (Liverpool John Moores University paragraph 17)
- the use of electronic recording and performance indicators in the monitoring and review of students and in managing and enhancing the quality of their learning opportunities (Liverpool John Moores University paragraphs 36, 149)
- the detailed nature of the University's programme specifications and their ready and secure availability through the internet (Liverpool John Moores University paragraph 162)
- the effectiveness of the rapporteur system in providing an independent critique of the annual monitoring process (Staffordshire University paragraphs 37 and 138)
- the comprehensiveness and collegial tone of the Assessment Handbook (University of Ulster paragraph 65)
- the quality of the virtual learning environment for the delivery of learning and student support for the Masters in Management (Ashridge paragraph 106)
- the timely completion of the annual course review process, and the speedy response to external examiners' reports through the annual course review reports, which allow effective action planning for the following year (Arts University College Bournemouth paragraphs 27 and 30)
- the ways in which the College compiles, analyses and uses management information in quality assurance and enhancement (The College of Law paragraph 46)
- the considered design of the College's online learning environment, which provides an integrated and comprehensive resource for both staff and students, and thereby promotes a culture of learning throughout the institution (The College of Law paragraphs 79 and 80)
- the practical and scholarly support provided in the Assessment Framework and the taught provision manuals (London Metropolitan University paragraphs 12 and 25)

- the deployment of personal academic advisers and their regular use of diagnostic data to identify and support undergraduate students at academic risk (London Metropolitan University paragraphs 48 and 57)
- the simplicity, clarity and flexibility of the frameworks for the design of the undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum (Norwich University College of the Arts paragraph 28)
- the active engagement of staff with management information across the University College and the way in which this is used to inform planning and decision-making (Norwich University College of the Arts paragraph 65)
- the structured approach to the implementation, support and monitoring of the University's initiatives to improve assessment policies and practice (Oxford Brookes University paragraph 122)
- the annual review of programmes of study, which is a well conceived process, thorough and transparent in its execution, leading to action plans that are systematically monitored (Royal Northern College of Music paragraph 21)
- the mechanisms for ensuring parity across the institution and consistency over time in the consideration of those cases of student assessment that might require a waiver of regulations (Royal Holloway, University of London paragraph 33)
- the effective contribution of the various central services to programme approval and review processes (Royal Holloway, University of London paragraph 47)
- the use of the Institutional Research Team to inform institutional practice at strategic and operational levels (Sheffield Hallam University paragraph 82)
- the attendance of Registry staff at examination boards that ensures consistent practice across the institution (St George's Hospital Medical School paragraph 69)
- the embedded relationship between research, teaching scholarship and professional practice (St George's Hospital Medical School paragraph 95)
- the use of the Principal's Dashboard of College indicators which provides easily accessible, key management data (St Mary's University College paragraph 27)
- the University College's promotion of selected enhancement themes, which encourage discussion and change at programme level (St Mary's University College paragraph 59)

Appendix B: Recommendations relating to assessment and feedback

- review the current approach to summary reporting on matters of academic standards to secure sound assurance that no significant issue is overlooked (The University of Bedfordshire paragraph 21)
- clarify the relationship between individual fields' interpretations of the University's 16-point marking scheme and general requirements for the fulfilment of learning outcomes (The University of Bedfordshire paragraph 41)
- implement consistently the requirements for training and support for postgraduate research students who teach and who conduct assessment (The University of Bedfordshire paragraph 120)
- expedite the production and publication of definitive programme specifications (Birkbeck University of London paragraph 44)
- assess the needs of all postgraduate research students who are engaged in teaching and provide appropriate training where necessary (Birkbeck University of London paragraph 84)
- effect regular review of aggregated statistical data to facilitate consideration of academic performance at the institutional level (Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln paragraphs 67, 68, 112 and 113)
- make systematic and timely consideration of revisions of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, and other elements of the Academic Infrastructure as they are published (Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln paragraph 71)
- that the University puts in place robust procedures and systems to ensure that the central deliberative bodies of the University are able to be assured that appropriate, timely and effective action has been taken on recommendations arising from its audit of collaborative provision (Brunel University London paragraphs 131, 132 and 139)
- the University should make fuller use of the data available to it from internal and external sources in order to benchmark and evaluate its academic standards (Brunel University London paragraph 71)
- the University should ensure that its external examiners are consistently well supported, briefed and trained (Brunel University London paragraphs 39 and 44)
- the University's deliberative bodies should consider fully how the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, has been mapped on to its own procedures and processes (Brunel University London paragraph 74)
- ensure consistency of approach to assessment across the range of its provision (Buckinghamshire New University paragraph 57)
- improve the consistency, collection and use of the course level data which informs the annual monitoring process (Buckinghamshire New University paragraphs 34, 35, 62)
- ensure that all participating postgraduate research students are formally prepared for teaching and assessment roles (Buckinghamshire New University paragraph 172)
- review the external examiner template, and the information given to external examiners, to ensure clear reporting about the standards of all awards and programmes, wherever delivered (Canterbury Christ Church University paragraphs 45, 46)
- ensure that considerations of, and responses to, external examiners' reports are consistently clear, timely, transparent and well documented (Canterbury Christ Church University paragraphs 49, 154, 155)
- students in preparation for teaching and assessment (Canterbury Christ Church University paragraphs 10, 181)

- that the University considers ways of ensuring that postgraduate research students have received the support to which they are entitled before they undertake teaching and/or assessment (University of Chester paragraph 175)
- to clarify the criteria for screening nominations of external examiners (Conservatoire for Dance & Drama paragraph 25)
- to improve the analysis and use of management information to ensure that all important issues can be identified and acted upon (Conservatoire for Dance & Drama paragraph 36)
- review and clarify, at university level, assessment regulations for each course (Cranfield University paragraph 47)
- use statistics on admissions and completion at university level to inform strategy and policy (Cranfield University paragraph 49)
- ensure the consistent application of the policy that all postgraduate research students who teach receive appropriate training (University of Derby paragraph 160)
- accelerate implementation of the University's decision to produce readily accessible programme specifications (University of Derby paragraph 170)
- strengthen the institutional-level oversight of external examiner appointment procedures (University of East London paragraph 14)
- strengthen the provision, analysis and utilisation of data on student retention and
- achievement at programme level (University of East London paragraph 29)
- ensure that all research students who teach and/or assess are formally prepared for these roles (University of East London paragraphs 54, 91)
- establish and formalise processes to ensure that the quality of learning opportunities for continuing students continues to be maintained once the proposed unified academic award regulations incorporating new assessment regulations are introduced (University of Gloucestershire paragraph 42)
- review the adequacy of its present deliberative structure to ensure the systematic, comprehensive management and effective discharge of its responsibilities for quality and standards (Guildhall School of Music & Drama paragraph 10)
- ensure that external examiners' moderating role is never compromised by direct participation in any element of assessment (Guildhall School Of Music & Drama paragraph 22)
- strengthen its procedures for assuring a systematic and comprehensive engagement with the Academic Infrastructure (Guildhall School Of Music & Drama paragraph 25)
- review regulations and policies with respect to assessment in order to eliminate potential inconsistencies of practice (University of Huddersfield paragraphs 55-58)
- ensure that all postgraduate research students receive appropriate training before they undertake teaching duties (University of Huddersfield paragraph 185)
- use experts external to the University in all validation panels (University of Huddersfield paragraphs 37 and 42)
- ensure that Senate, or the relevant committee reporting to it, is provided with sufficient information on external examiners' reports to discharge responsibility for the oversight of academic standards (Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine paragraph 42)
- ensure that any changes to the academic infrastructure are identified and that any appropriate modifications to Institute procedures and policies are implemented in a timely and systematic manner and disseminated to staff (Institute of Education paragraph 44, 54)
- to ensure that programme approval, monitoring and review procedures are consistent, rigorous and independent, and include a full consideration of module content (King's College London paragraphs 16, 18, 25 and 84)

- to 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)
- to ensure the consistent application of its assessment criteria, including achieving consistency in the exercise of the discretionary elements of the Regulations for Examinations (King's College London paragraphs 37 and 38)
- to ensure the systematic collection, analysis, dissemination and utilisation of student data and feedback (King's College London paragraph 52)
- to involve external subject experts in all programme reviews to assure itself of academic standards and the appropriateness of the curriculum (King's College London paragraph 21)
- ensure that awards of the 'recognition and validation' type in overseas collaborative provision are aligned with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), published in 2008 (Liverpool John Moores University paragraph 115)
- 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, 166)
- ensure that there is a clearly communicated and consistently operated system of deadlines for the provision to students of feedback on assessment (Liverpool John Moores University paragraph 33)
- ensure that postgraduate research students undertaking teaching are provided with adequate guidance and support (Liverpool John Moores University paragraph 155)
- address the variation in practice across the faculties in implementing institutional policy and processes with regard to the quality of learning opportunities, in particular in relation to the timeliness of feedback on and the return of assessed work (London South Bank University paragraphs 75, 102, 104, 107)
- establish a set of comprehensive university-wide assessment criteria to help maintain consistent standards across all provision, both on and off-campus (The Manchester Metropolitan University paragraphs 25, 28, 50, 60 and 144)
- the University should identify those features of the student learning experience (such as feedback on assessment, assessment information, access to personal tutoring, and handbook content) for which unambiguous requirements must be defined and implemented for the benefit of all students (The Manchester Metropolitan University paragraphs 51-53, 62, 63, 67, 101-103, 105, 118 and 173)
- extend, as widely as possible, opportunities for students to benefit from the University's investment in learning technology (University of Newcastle upon Tyne paragraph 69)
- review the scope and ways in which management information/data is flagged and used to inform the annual programme monitoring process (The University of Northumbria at Newcastle paragraph 53)
- extend the academic scrutiny of external examiner reports at institutional level (University of Nottingham paragraph 45)
- expedite the planned harmonisation of its assessment practices (University of Nottingham paragraph 58)
- the University should accelerate its processes for responding to the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure (Staffordshire University paragraphs 52, 57, 58 and 137)
- the University should develop further its assessment policy to specify the requirements and expectations for timely and structured feedback to students on assessed work (Staffordshire University paragraphs 103 and 150)

- ensure that all postgraduate research students involved in the assessment of students are appropriately trained and prepared for this work (University of Teesside paragraph 153)
- monitor the consistency of the use by programmes and schools of its internally generated performance data for taught programmes (University of Teesside paragraph 41)
- ensure plagiarism cases are consistently identified and recorded (University of Ulster paragraph 73)
- review the requirements for external examiner participation in the consideration of
- assessment tasks and outcomes at all higher education levels of undergraduate courses (University of Ulster paragraph 67)
- ensure that the revised arrangements for Guided Independent Study consistently provide a positive and integrated learning experience for students (University of Westminster paragraphs 44, 56, 68-69)
- expedite the presentation of management information in a more easily accessible form to facilitate the work of course teams in preparing for annual monitoring (University of Westminster paragraph 60)
- make clear that the University's policy for Teaching Informed and Enriched by Research is intended to give opportunities for research within the curriculum (University of Westminster paragraphs 76-77)
- ensure that the University's policy on training for postgraduate students who teach is adhered to and consistently applied (University of Westminster paragraph 132)
- continue to harmonise the assessment regulations across its programmes (Ashridge paragraph 69)
- ensure that the application of academic policies and processes is effective in securing the academic standards of its collaborative provision (University of Bolton paragraph 198)
- Formally review the rigour and timeliness of the collaborative provision programme approval process (University of Bolton paragraph 169)
- ensure that the partner approval process provides sufficient confidence in partners' ability to deliver on their contractual obligations and that agreements are fully developed by the time students enrol (University of Bolton paragraph 173)
- ensure the accuracy and currency of website content with regard to programmes delivered collaboratively (University of Bolton paragraph 230)
- establish a systematic institutional framework for assessment and award (The College of Law paragraph 42)
- give thought to extending the type and range of external involvement in the programme approval process (The College of Law paragraph 23)
- report formally to individual external examiners on action taken in response to
- matters raised in their reports (Courtauld Institute of Art paragraph 26)
- define, implement consistently, and communicate clearly to staff and students the policies and procedures relating to plagiarism and extenuating circumstances (The Courtauld Institute of Art paragraph 33)
- ensure compliance with HEFCE 2006/45 in making programme specifications publicly available (University of Cumbria paragraph 157)
- develop and implement a procedure on programme closure (University of Cumbria paragraph 58)
- ensure the current timetables for the implementation of the levelisation project and periodic reviews are achieved (Heythrop College, University of London paragraphs 40 and 66)
- ensure revisions to the *Code of practice* are routinely and systematically considered through the College's deliberative structures (Heythrop College, University of London paragraph 73)

- review the effectiveness of the annual review and development process to ensure the appropriate monitoring of programmes at field/course level and the necessary oversight at institutional level, as specified in Section F of the Academic Quality and Standards Handbook (Kingston University paragraph 26)
- 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, 37)
- ensure that the course and programme approval system addresses more explicitly, both in the information presented and in the consideration given to it, institutional expectations as to the levels, progression and academic standards of any proposed provision (London School of Economics and Political Science paragraph 21)
- ensure the systematic inclusion of external assessors in periodic programme review (London School of Economics and Political Science paragraph 22)
- develop further its utilisation of management information, the better to support its evaluation of award standards and the quality of learning opportunities (London School of Economics and Political Science paragraphs 24, 40)
- adapt its external examiner report form to ensure that it elicits evaluative responses from all examiners (London School of Economics and Political Science paragraph 14)
- the University College should reduce variability in annual monitoring by improving analysis, evaluation and reflection in order to achieve better upward reporting and a more informed institutional overview (Newman University College paragraphs 53 and 153)
- the University College should ensure a complete, consistent and synchronised publication of programme specifications and handbooks (Newman University College paragraphs 64 and 195)
- the University College should further enhance the use of management information across the institutional reporting processes (Newman University College paragraphs 60 and 76)
- the University College should promote both comparable student support and consistent application of regulations across all programmes (Newman University College paragraph 130)
- consider ways in which it can ensure that minutes across all school and course committees are a meaningful record of the committees' deliberations (Norwich University College of the Arts paragraphs 40 and 45)
- strengthen its quality management processes in order to provide a more comprehensive and explicit institutional oversight of the academic standards and comparability of all awards (Oxford Brookes University paragraphs 12, 16, 26, 28-30, 32, 34-37, 40-42, 45-47, 51, 54-56, 60, 129, 143, 146-148 and 154)
- ensure that all postgraduate research students who participate in teaching and/or the assessment of students receive appropriate training prior to undertaking these duties (Oxford Brookes University paragraphs 111 and 173)
- ensure that all student handbooks provide, in a timely way, complete, consistent and current information consonant with University regulations (Oxford Brookes University paragraphs 159, 160, 176 and 188)
- to revise its guidance to examination boards on their scope for discretion in deciding the degree classification of students so as to ensure that the lower limit of the mark range within which discretion may be exercised is uniformly applied (Queen Mary, University of London Paragraph 42)
- to bring to a conclusion its debate on the process for handling extenuating circumstances in the context of decisions on assessment and the granting of awards, and to implement a consistent approach across the institution based on clear and equitable criteria (Queen Mary, University of London paragraph 43)

- to establish a mechanism which ensures that any research student undertaking teaching, assessment or similar duties has received appropriate training (Queen Mary, University of London paragraph 87)
- to reconcile the various minor inconsistencies, relating to award classification and student appeals, between the practical application of procedures and their documentation for students (Royal Northern College of Music paragraph 31).
- to ensure that programme validation reports contain a confirmatory note indicating that the validation process has, for the purpose of checking the academic standard of the programme, included explicit reference to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and any relevant subject benchmark statements (Royal Holloway, University of London paragraph 18)
- to establish a timescale for departments to make their written response to external examiners, addressing issues identified in their reports (Royal Holloway, University of London paragraph 25)
- to ensure that descriptions of programmes of study in departmental handbooks always include the overall learning outcomes of the programme and their mode of assessment (Royal Holloway, University of London paragraph 30)
- specify time limits for the implementation and reporting of actions arising from the conditions and recommendations set through validation and periodic review (St George's Hospital Medical School paragraph 53)
- ensure that all validation and review panel reports include confirmation of engagement with the Academic Infrastructure in line with St George's documented procedures (St George's Hospital Medical School paragraph 52)
- develop and implement an institution-wide policy to specify a timescale for the return of assessed work to students (St George's Hospital Medical School paragraph 72)
- rebalance quality and standards committee work to achieve: (i) a more analytical and influential role for school committees and Validation and Review Committee; and (ii) the involvement of a wider pool of academic staff (St Mary's University College paragraph 15)
- develop a clear procedure for managing the termination of programmes and partnerships in order both to secure the student experience and to ensure effective institutional oversight of the process (St Mary's University College paragraph 63)
- respond thoroughly and in a timely manner to external reports and take steps to ensure the accuracy and completeness of internal reports (St Mary's University College paragraph 65)
- ensure that partner institutions publish full programme specifications in a manner accessible to potential as well as current students (St Mary's University College paragraph 84)
- strengthen the external academic and professional contribution to periodic review throughout the procedure (University College Birmingham paragraph 17)
- in the context of its strategic intention to expand its overseas collaborative provision, that the University College establish secure and systematic institutional oversight of such provision, including the monitoring of compliance with its stated operational and institutional requirements (University College Plymouth St Mark & St John paragraphs 101 to 109, 112)
- operate its programme approval processes in such a way as to ensure that all programmes are formally approved by the Learning, Quality and Standards Committee before students are enrolled (University College Plymouth St Mark & St John paragraph 21)
- examine whether the current approach to the recording of matters discussed at meetings is sufficiently detailed and precise to establish clearly the status of decisions taken and demonstrate institutional assurance and oversight of the

operation of learning and teaching at all levels in the institution (University College Plymouth St Mark & St John paragraph 86)

- keep under review the way in which material is presented in the Student Regulations Framework, in the interests of the clarity and accessibility of the various categories of information (University College Plymouth St Mark & St John paragraph 123)
- require the School of Advanced Study to: undertake regular reviews of the currency and scope of its Quality Assurance Framework (paragraph 10); develop and implement an approach to annual monitoring that ensures an holistic evaluation of
- each taught and research programme (paragraphs 19 and 68); adopt a consistent and effective approach to periodic programme review (paragraph 20); develop a reliable means of assuring itself that it complies with its Regulatory Framework, with particular regard to the QAA Academic Infrastructure (paragraph 22)
- prescribe common assessment practices for all taught programmes, permitting variation only after consideration of an academic rationale and approval at School level (paragraph 26)
- use, as a matter of routine, student management information in assuring itself of the quality and academic standards of taught and research degrees (paragraphs 28 and 32)
- ensure consistency in faculty procedures for the annual monitoring of programme reviews, and in the faculty monitoring of external examiners' reports and the responses made to them (University of West London paragraph 24)
- to review the course approval process to ensure that all approval decisions are fully informed and have appropriate externality (University of Worcester paragraphs 30 to 33)
- that graduate teaching assistants are given appropriate induction and training for their teaching role prior to starting their duties and receive regular formal feedback thereafter (Writtle College paragraph 153)
- formally review its deliberative committee structure, in particular: ensuring the effective institutional oversight of academic standards and student learning opportunities (paragraphs 8 and 74)
- ensure the use of independent external expertise in the approval of new or significantly or cumulatively amended modules which contribute to final awards (York St John University paragraph 20)
- ensure that the Independent and Professional Studies Framework meets all expectations of the Academic Infrastructure (York St John University paragraph 29)
- ensure the alignment of the academic standards of all master's-level awards with the level descriptors for master's programmes in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (York St John University paragraph 34)
- institute a formal procedure for institutional-level committee consideration of external examiner nominations, including those for collaborative provision (York St John University paragraphs 15 and 76)
- give consideration to augmenting the external examiners' report template by:
  - providing details of the site and mode of delivery of modules examined (paragraphs 17 and 76)
  - providing an opportunity for comment on the nature and adequacy of responses made to the previous year's recommendations (paragraphs 17 and 76).
- provide a programme specification for each joint honours award (York St John University paragraph 33)
- review the effectiveness with which it communicates relevant aspects of its assessment policies to students (York St John University paragraphs 39 and 90).

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: The 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
York St. John University

The full text of the Institutional Audit reports is available from:
www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/Pages/default.aspx

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

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