



QAA

**Outcomes from institutional audit
The self-evaluation document
in institutional audit**



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Summary

This paper is based on the first 70 institutional audit reports, published between 2002 and November 2004. From the evidence available in the audit reports, it reviews the contribution made by institutions' own self-evaluation documents to the audit process and the degree to which self-evaluation documents were or were not 'evaluative'. The paper also identifies common themes in institutions' own analyses of their arrangements for quality and academic standards.

In institutional audit from 2002-06, the self-evaluation formed the 'key reference point' for the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) audit teams, who were advised to view it as an early indicator of the institution's capacity for critical self-evaluation and self-regulation. Overall, almost half of the first 70 institutional audit reports commented that the self-evaluation documents provided to support the audits were both evaluative and accurate. No self-evaluation was considered to be both unevaluative and inaccurate.

Many reports stated that self-evaluation documents were found to be frank, honest and self-critical, though occasionally criticisms directed by institutions at their own arrangements for quality and academic standards were found to have overstated their deficiencies. Conversely, in a few other cases audit reports found that self-evaluation documents overstated the strengths of the institution's arrangements.

From the audit reports, an analysis of the topics identified by institutions as the focus for self-critical comment in their self-evaluation documents is instructive. Allowing for some overlap, almost two-thirds of the self-evaluations were said to refer to weaknesses in institutions' arrangements to communicate with their students, a third to identify matters connected with quality management, and another third to specify matters to do with staffing and staff development as areas for further attention. In terms of individual topics within these broad areas, securing adequate levels of student representation appeared in many self-evaluation documents. In several instances, however, the audit reports found that students were more satisfied with arrangements than the self-evaluation document indicated.

In the area of quality management, the audit reports found that critical comments in self-evaluation documents tended to focus more on the approval of new provision than other aspects such as annual monitoring and periodic review. Self-evaluation documents made some references to the need to enhance management information systems and arrangements to collect and analyse data and use statistics. Several were said to have commented on the difficulty of ensuring that established staff attended staff development activities. Few self-evaluation documents included self-critical comments on institutions' assessment and their classification arrangements for honours degrees.

Outcomes from institutional audit

Preface

An objective of institutional audit is 'to contribute, in conjunction with other mechanisms, to the promotion and enhancement of high quality in teaching and learning'. One of the ways in which this can be accomplished is through identifying features of good practice across the reports and areas where reports have commonly offered recommendations for improvement.

In due course, QAA intends to produce an extended reflection on institutional audit in the *Learning from...* series, but since the final institutional audit reports in the audit cycle were not published until August 2006, *Learning from institutional audit* is unlikely to be published before late 2007. To give institutions and other stakeholders more timely information, QAA decided to produce a series of short working papers, describing features of good practice and summarising recommendations from the audit reports, to be published under the generic title *Outcomes from institutional audit* (hereafter, *Outcomes...*).

This paper identifies not only the few features of good practice linked to the self-evaluation document that appear in the audit reports, but also features of individual self-evaluation documents reported positively in the audit reports. Unlike other *Outcomes...* papers, it also draws on material from the Findings section of the audit reports. This is the only section in the reports to offer direct comments by the audit team on the accuracy and evaluative qualities of the institution's self-evaluation document and the contribution it made to the audit. In some respects this paper can be seen as a companion to the *Outcomes...* paper on the student written submission.

So that readers can readily refer to the relevant audit report, the name of the institution used when identifying references is the name that appears on the relevant audit report on the QAA website. For those institutions where a change of name has subsequently taken place, this is noted in Appendix 1 (page 15), and is the correct name at the time of publication of this paper.

This first series of *Outcomes...* papers is based on the 70 institutional audit reports published by the end of November 2004. The second series will draw on institutional audit reports published following the 2004-05 audits, and it is likely that there will be some overlap in topics between the first and second series. Papers in each series are perhaps best seen as 'work in progress'. Although QAA retains copyright in the contents of the *Outcomes...* papers, they can be freely downloaded from QAA's website and cited, with acknowledgement for research and educational purposes.

Introduction

1 This paper is based on an analysis of the first 70 institutional audit reports published by November 2004 (see Appendix 1, page 15). A note on the methodology used to produce this and other papers in the *Outcomes...* series can be found in Appendix 4 (page 21).

2 QAA's mission is to 'safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education'. It does this by working with higher education institutions (which are individually responsible for the quality of their provision and the academic standards of the awards to which that provision leads) to define academic standards and quality against which to carry out academic audits of institutions. The audits are conducted by teams of peer auditors.

3 QAA publishes the findings of these audits in institutional audit reports. The main purpose of these reports is to confirm that each institution has measures in place to check for itself that its provision is soundly managed and the academic standards of its awards are secure, and that the institution is in a position to act (when and where appropriate) to ensure that this continues to be the case.

4 In the period covered by this paper, the starting point for each institutional audit was a self-evaluation of the institution's arrangements and their effectiveness, written by the institution hosting the audit. The *Handbook for institutional audit: England* (2002) (the *Handbook*) described the self-evaluation document as 'a key reference point for the audit team'. It stated that the self-evaluation should reflect the audit focus on 'the institution's own procedures for assuring the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards, and on its published information about quality and standards' (*Handbook*, Annex B, paragraph 1).

5 In the institutional audits conducted between 2002 and 2005, the institution's self-evaluation set the scene for the audit. It either provided the necessary information to support the audit, or pointed audit teams to where that information could be found. Those writing a self-evaluation document were informed by the *Handbook* that it:

...should provide sufficient description to enable the audit team to understand the key features of the institution's approach to assuring quality and securing standards, but should focus on the effectiveness of that approach. Where the institution expresses confidence in its own effectiveness, the evidence upon which its view is based should be made clear: a successful SED [self-evaluation document] will minimise the need for further clarification by the team. Because it is largely upon the SED that the team's perceptions of, and confidence in, the institution will be based (at least in the first instance), it is important that the SED is both accurate and verifiable. (*Handbook*, Annex B, paragraph 5)

6 Hence, the central function of the self-evaluation document was to provide a succinct but comprehensive and - above all - accurate description of the institution's procedures. The intention was that it should include enough descriptive material to enable the audit team (as informed outsiders) to understand the institution's key strategic objectives and operational procedures, together with sufficient analysis and

Outcomes from institutional audit

self-evaluation to point the team to areas of strengths and also weaknesses the institution had identified for itself. The expectation underlying this approach was that, within sensible bounds, institutions would be willing to present themselves to QAA audit teams as changing organisations, with both strengths and areas of as yet unresolved difficulties.

7 The approach described above was intended to enable audit teams to come to a view on the appropriate level of confidence they could ascribe to the institution's present and likely future management of quality and standards. In part, they could come to such a view through seeking out and identifying evidence on the part of the institution of a competent, creative and developmental approach to engaging with, managing and learning from day-to-day challenges. In this connection it should be noted that prompts in the template QAA provided for its institutional audit reports (to help in structuring the reports) invited audit teams to start from relevant statements in the self-evaluation when writing about each aspect of the institution's arrangements for managing quality and academic standards. Audit teams were also asked to evaluate the adequacy and accuracy of the statements made by institutions in their self-evaluation documents when describing, analysing and coming to a view on the effectiveness of the institutional arrangements to which they related.

8 The previous paragraph refers to cases where audit reports found self-evaluation documents to have been accurate and evaluative. However, where an audit team's enquiries led to a different conclusion, the expectation was that the audit report would identify omissions, inaccuracies or poorly supported judgements in the self-evaluation document and summarise those comments. Hence, within the Findings section of the audit report the team was explicitly required to comment briefly on the 'utility of the SED [self-evaluation document] as an illustration of the institution's capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and limitations, and to act on these to enhance quality and standards'. QAA's template for the institutional audit reports supplemented this by asking teams to give their 'view of the clarity, accuracy and comprehensiveness of the SED, particularly as a vehicle for demonstrating the institution's capacity for self-evaluation'.

9 Based on analysis of the 70 audit reports published by November 2004, the present paper identifies the views of institutions' self-evaluations expressed in these reports. It draws first on that part of the Findings section of the reports in which audit teams were asked to comment on the usefulness of the institution's self-evaluation document in enabling them to come to a view on the institution's capacity for self-evaluation (see above). It also identifies significant points at which comment on the self-evaluation document appears in other sections of the audit reports.

10 In addition, the paper examines instances where the enquiries undertaken by audit teams led them to disagree with the positions advanced by self-evaluation documents. This is followed by an analysis of the nature and focus of the self-critical comments made by institutions about their own arrangements in their self-evaluation documents. In part, this is so that the paper can offer a view on what a cross-section of institutions collectively considered to be priorities for the development and enhancement of their quality and academic standards arrangements.

Features of good practice

11 A preliminary comment is in order. At the beginning of the transitional institutional audit process in 2002-03 - and in response to requests for advice from institutions and audit teams - QAA took the view that since a prime characteristic of candidates for features of good practice should be their potential for transferability (internally or to other institutions), the self-evaluation document would not ordinarily be considered as a possible feature of good practice. Hence, in only two cases in the audit reports published between 2003 and November 2004 was the self-evaluation document so identified:

- the self-critical approach used by the University to prepare the clear and evaluative institutional [self-evaluation document] [Manchester Metropolitan University, paragraph 202 i; paragraph 26]
- the characteristically self-critical and inclusive approach used by the College to prepare the institutional [self-evaluation document] [Trinity and All Saints College, paragraph 147 i; paragraph 24].

In many more cases, however, comments on individual self-evaluation documents were so positive that it would be misrepresenting the overall picture not to identify those instances too. They therefore follow in the next two paragraphs.

12 The positive comments within the Findings section of the audit reports tended to relate to 'comprehensiveness' and to an institutional capacity for self-evaluation. A number of reports referred to comprehensiveness, in two cases as a yardstick which had not been met, but positively in other cases. For example, audit reports referred to self-evaluation documents as follows:

- a comprehensive guide to the extensive arrangements for quality assurance undertaken by the University [Anglia Polytechnic University, paragraph 254]
- helpfully cross-referenced to a comprehensive set of key documents that were made available during the audit visit [King's College London, paragraph 262]
- a clear, accurate and comprehensive outline of the School's framework for quality assurance [Norwich School of Art and Design, paragraph 142]
- a clear and comprehensive description of the University's arrangements [University of Oxford, paragraph 242]
- comprehensive and open, providing a clear account of the College's procedures and practices [College of St Mark and St John, paragraph 184]
- comprehensive and concise [University of York, paragraph 192].

13 In addition, in a considerable number of cases where the word 'comprehensive' was not used, a synonym such as 'full' was employed or comprehensiveness could be inferred. For example, audit reports commented that self-evaluation documents:

- provided a frank and clear description and analysis...which the audit team found it was able to rely on [Aston University, paragraph 249]
- gave a full and analytical description of the University's procedures for assuring the quality of programmes and for securing the academic standards of its awards [University of Brighton, paragraph 251]

Outcomes from institutional audit

- successfully conveyed the far-reaching sequence of changes incurred since the 1993 audit [University of Buckingham, paragraph 133]
- provided an evaluative overview of the systems and procedures operated by [the institution], and their development and implementation [University College Chichester, paragraph 52]
- gave a clear description of the Institute's procedures for assuring the quality of programmes and for securing the academic standards of its awards, and provided a clear and cogent evaluation of the effectiveness of these procedures [Institute of Education, University of London, paragraph 155]
- provided clear descriptions of the University's quality management and academic standards arrangements followed, in each case, by the University's comments and reflections [Loughborough University, paragraph 313].

The usefulness of self-evaluation documents to the institutional audit process

14 Analysis of the comments made in each of the first 70 institutional audit reports on the usefulness of the self-evaluation document as an indicator of individual institutions' self-evaluative capacities is instructive (see Appendix 4, page 21). In assessing the self-evaluations from audit reports' comments, using a matrix formed from two three-point scales (evaluative/partly evaluative/not evaluative, and accurate/partly accurate/not accurate), about 30 self-evaluations could be viewed as both wholly evaluative and wholly accurate. Again, from the views expressed in the audit reports, more than two-thirds of the self-evaluation documents were considered evaluative or partly evaluative and only a small number not completely accurate. Although more than 10 self-evaluations were considered wholly non-evaluative and either partially or wholly accurate, no self-evaluation document was considered to be wholly inaccurate. None of the 70 self-evaluation documents was considered wholly non-evaluative and wholly inaccurate, although one was stated to contain significant inaccuracies.

15 The notion of evaluation (sometimes described as analysis) permeates almost all the comments on self-evaluation documents in the 70 audit reports. Frequently, the self-evaluation was simply noted as an indication that the institution concerned had - or had not - met the expectation that evaluation should be present. For example, the self-evaluation document of one institution was said to be 'more descriptive than evaluative', that of another 'did not fully engage with an evaluation of the effectiveness of the [institution's] procedures for the management of its quality and standards', while that of a third 'did not engage with an evaluation of the effectiveness of the processes in place to manage quality and standards, nor did it show that the [institution] undertook such an evaluation on a regular and systematic basis'. Meanwhile, the self-evaluation document of one institution offered 'an acceptable level of reflection on the University's quality assurance processes', and that of another 'described and evaluated many of the key elements of the [institution's] quality management and enhancement] systems and was thoroughly underpinned with links to supporting documentation'.

16 Occasionally in the audit reports, evaluation was associated with a concept, such as 'frankness', as a good in itself, consonant with a value which might reasonably be expected to be embedded within a learning environment. Thus one report considered that the self-evaluation document was 'balanced and gave appropriate and accurate weight to strengths and issues that the [institution] considered needed further development', while another institution's self-evaluation was seen as 'an informative and honest account of its ongoing achievements and the challenges it is currently facing'. In a further report, the self-evaluation document was said to have 'reflected frankly on issues either still requiring attention or on perceptions and problems relating to implementation', while in another institution 'the audit team noted some refreshingly honest comments on areas of weakness identified by senior managers'.

17 In some cases, audit reports considered that the self-evaluation document did not capture the character of the institution - to the latter's disadvantage in some cases, as this example suggests: 'the balance between description, analysis and evaluation did not fully reflect the capacity for self-evaluation which the [institution] revealed in the minutes of its internal meetings and during the course of some of its discussions with the team'. A similar point was made about another institution, with the audit report stating that the self-evaluation document tended 'towards description rather than evaluation and did not always demonstrate the institution's capacity for self-evaluation'. Again, in the case of a further institution, 'it appeared that the tone of the self-evaluation document had been overly self-critical in some respects and that the [institution] had strengths that became clear to the team during the audit and which might have featured more explicitly in the self-evaluation document'. Conversely, the report on another institution stated that 'in some instances [the self-evaluation document] gave the impression of a more strategic and coherent approach to these areas than, in the event, the audit team found to be entirely justified'. While an institution's understating of its achievements may be less of a weakness than overstatement, it nonetheless points to a less perceptive and fully rounded appreciation of its performance than might be considered desirable.

18 In two cases, consistency of view between that of the institution and that reached by the audit team was seen as endorsing the accuracy of the former. One of these audit reports commented that the 'broad alignment between the strengths and limitations identified by the [institution] and the findings of the audit supports confidence in the [institution's] capacity for institutional-level reflection and self-evaluation'. In the other, the report stated that in the course of the audit 'it emerged that there was generally a good match between the findings of the audit and the [institution's] own identified strengths and limitations, giving confidence in the [institution's] self-awareness'.

19 As noted in paragraphs 7-8 above, the *Handbook* invited audit teams to comment on whether the evaluative dimension of a self-evaluation document served as a predictor of sound management, and to treat the absence of evaluative comment as a prompt for further enquiries. Comments in several audit reports illustrate the positive side of this approach. In one case, for example, the report considered that the self-evaluation document 'reflected a level of self-evaluation which gave the team confidence that the [institution] would maintain a level of rigorous

Outcomes from institutional audit

scrutiny and would continue to act to enhance its provision'. Likewise, another institution's self-evaluation was viewed as 'a self-confident, frank and perceptive document that demonstrated the [institution's] capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and limitations, and to identify and tackle problems'. In a third report, the self-evaluation was viewed as 'an important demonstration of maturity and self-criticality on the part of the [institution], and one that helped give the team confidence in the capacity of the [institution] to develop its arrangements for managing academic quality'.

20 The previous paragraph refers to cases where audit reports found the appraisals offered by the self-evaluation document to be both well founded and sound, so that it was subsequently possible to confirm the document as a predictor of the institution's self-critical and self-regulating capacities. The two audit reports which identified the self-evaluation document as a feature of good practice stated this in specific terms. One of these noted that the self-evaluation document 'gave a clear description of the [institution's] quality assurance arrangements and a thorough evaluation of their effectiveness. [It] identified areas of strength but also included areas requiring further improvement...the quality of the [self-evaluation document], in particular its structure, clarity, and self-critical approach was a feature of good practice [Manchester Metropolitan University, paragraph 26].

21 The other audit report to include the self-evaluation document as a feature of good practice related this to the 'characteristically self-critical and inclusive approach' followed by the institution in preparing its self-evaluation document. In terms very similar to those noted above, the self-evaluation document was described as having given 'a clear description of quality assurance arrangements and a thorough evaluation of their effectiveness.... [It]...identified elements of strength but was also open about those areas of the [institution's] current practice that it had identified as requiring further improvement or enhancement'. The report went on to say that in 'its meetings with staff and its review of additional documentation, the team formed the view that this self-critical and inclusive approach was characteristic of the [institution] and wished to cite this as an example of good practice' [Trinity and All Saints College, paragraph 24].

22 An audit report's identification of the self-evaluation document as a predictor could also occur, however, where the self-evaluation was not wholly evaluative and/or accurate. For example, one report commented on a self-evaluation where the 'overall lack of a strategic emphasis within the document with little reference to the development, implementation and monitoring of central policies for quality assurance processes and consistency of academic standards was noted by the audit team', and considered that it 'reflected the current situation at the [institution]'. In the particular context, this could be as much a comment on the institution as on the self-evaluation. Similarly, another report remarked that 'the usefulness of the self-evaluation document was limited by the inherent difficulty of providing a comprehensive and evidence-based analysis of a quality management framework in which responsibilities are distributed across 32 departments'. The report further commented that the 'self-evaluation document was sometimes imprecise about how weaknesses were going to be addressed and actual progress on some developments fell short of the self-evaluation document's estimate'.

23 In the same vein, one self-evaluation document which was frequently criticised in the relevant audit report was said to have 'provided only limited evaluative information' and not to have conveyed to the audit team 'that quality was embedded and that quality issues are routinely picked up and addressed by established [institutional] processes'. Similarly, in another report the self-evaluation document was said to demonstrate that 'overt reflection on the effectiveness of quality management procedures is in prospect rather than current practice, and there appeared to be a tendency for procedures to be more reactive rather than proactive'. A further report commented that the self-evaluation document 'conveyed a sense of some propensity for overload in the context of the internal review process, but did not otherwise engage to any great extent in evaluation of the effectiveness of the [institution's] procedures for the management of its quality and standards in courses and programmes'. Lastly, another report noted that the relevant self-evaluation document was 'stronger on description than self-evaluation, the self-critical elements of its commentary being limited, by and large, to identifying instances in which processes had not been followed properly, rather than to evaluative reflection on the processes themselves'.

24 As the above extracts indicate, comments on self-evaluation documents in some audit reports suggest limitations in institutions' own understanding of their quality and academic standards arrangements. These are, however, exceptions: very few of the self-evaluation documents provided to support institutional audits between 2003 and November 2004 showed evidence of 'little willingness...to reflect on the possible limitations of [an institution's] current system of quality assurance'. Overwhelmingly, institutions were prepared to 'engage...seriously with the current and future appropriateness of [their] quality management and academic standards procedures'.

Comments in institutional audit reports on the self-evaluation document

25 As noted, most institutional audit reports regarded the relevant self-evaluation documents as predominantly accurate and evaluative. Comments elsewhere in the reports supplemented those in the Findings section on the utility and accuracy of self-evaluations and their usefulness as an indicator of institutions' capacity for self-reflection leading to improvement.

26 In most cases, positive comments in the audit reports simply confirmed or agreed with specific statements or claims in self-evaluation documents. This might be expected when the primary purpose of the self-evaluation document was to serve as a key reference point for the audit team. For example, one report observed that in its discussions with members of the institution, the 'quality of debate revealed a capacity for critical analysis and reflection, which had, in the view of the team, always been apparent in the [self-evaluation document]'.

27 Occasionally, however, complimentary comments were couched in terms suggesting that the self-evaluation document failed to do justice to the institution's accomplishments. While this might be interpreted as symptomatic of understatement on the institution's part, it could also be seen as pointing to a limitation in the institution's capacity to identify and realistically put forward actual or potential areas

Outcomes from institutional audit

of strength. For example, one audit report commented that the 'students who met the team were unstinting in their praise for the efforts of the staff and thought the self-evaluation document had been unduly modest in this respect: in this area, they said "[the institution's staff] deliver more than they say they do". In another case, the report observed that 'while the University expressed some caution in the self-evaluation document about the current sufficiency and reliability of its new statistical information management system, the audit team saw evidence of clearly presented and detailed analyses of relevant student data'.

28 More overtly critical comments about self-evaluation documents fell into two main categories: those seen in retrospect to have overstated claims for institutional achievement, and those characterised by imprecision and lack of evaluative content.

Overstated claims

29 Comments in a number of institutional audit reports pointed to overstated claims made in the self-evaluation document on behalf of the institution. For example, one report stated that the audit team had 'heard from staff that procedures were not always followed and it saw review documentation which was descriptive rather than evaluative and did not identify "examples of good and/or innovative practice in learning, teaching and assessment" which the self-evaluation document stated was a requirement and is a purpose of periodic review'.

30 Another audit report noted that 'the self-evaluation document stated that "the Codes of Practice [sic] had been distributed to the relevant departments in the [institution] for review against existing policies and procedures"'. In this case, the report stated that 'the team could identify no reference to, or use of, the *Code of practice* in refining programme review procedures'. In another institution, where the 'self-evaluation document stated that "the College's course portfolio wholly [conformed] to the FHEQ [*The Framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*]"...no indication of the process by which the [institution] engaged with the FHEQ was outlined in the self-evaluation document, and neither the programme specifications supplied as part of the [discipline self-evaluation documents], nor the programme specification template, contained references to the FHEQ'.

Imprecision and lack of evaluative content

31 Several audit reports referred to imprecision and/or lack of evaluative content in self-evaluation documents. For example, in one institution in 'view of the volume of the [collaborative] provision the team noted with interest the limited evaluative commentary on collaborative provision and the operation of the partnership in the...institutional self-evaluation document'. In another case, the audit report commented that although 'the self-evaluation document stated that the [institution's] Code of Practice had been updated to take account of the Academic Infrastructure, neither the Code nor the memoranda of agreement, which formalise the relationship between the [institution] and its partner colleges, contain systematic references to the Academic Infrastructure'.

Self-critical comments in institutions' self-evaluation documents

32 This section of the paper reviews comments outside the Findings section of institutional audit reports on the evaluative characteristics of the relevant self-evaluation documents. It also looks at what might be learned or inferred from the nature of institutions' comments, and the presence, partial presence or absence of self-critical comment.

33 For an institution's self-evaluation document to be considered honest and evaluative, it is not necessary that it should contain self-criticisms. However, the presence of self-criticism is very likely, particularly when linked to an audit process that focuses on institutional arrangements and procedures. In a number of cases, audit reports stated that self-evaluation documents described problems that the institution had subsequently (and often before the audit visit) resolved. In other cases, reports stated that self-evaluation documents had honestly and helpfully recounted challenges which had yet to be resolved.

34 It should be reiterated at this point that no self-evaluation documents were read specially while preparing this paper, and that the remarks and observations about self-evaluation documents derive solely from comments in the institutional audit reports. That said, it seems likely that any significant problem highlighted by an institution in its self-evaluation document would be referred to in the relevant audit report, given the institution's own identification of the problem.

The topics of self-critical comments

35 This section provides an overview of the topics that institutions selected for self-critical observations in their self-evaluation documents. To a limited degree, it encapsulates the views of a cross-section of institutions on aspects of quality and academic standards management where improvements could be made.

36 Of the 70 institutional audit reports published between 2003 and November 2004, fewer than one-fifth indicated that the self-evaluation documents concerned could be considered to contain no self-critical comments. Of the remainder, many reports recounted or cited substantial critical observations and comments drawn from self-evaluation documents. In order of frequency with which self-critical comments were attributed to self-evaluation documents:

- almost two-thirds of the audit reports contained self-critical observations on aspects of institutions' relations with students. In this general area, observations derived from self-evaluation documents could be found on **personal tutoring, the return of marked work, and representation arrangements for students**
- more than one-third of the reports cited self-critical comments from self-evaluation documents relating to the **quality management arrangements** of the relevant institutions
- in almost the same amount of cases, reports cited critical comments in self-evaluation documents on **staff development, peer observation of teaching and appraisal arrangements for staff**.

Outcomes from institutional audit

37 Almost two-thirds of the 70 institutional audit reports published by November 2004 alluded to or cited references in self-evaluation documents to aspects of institutions' relations with their students. Reading the comments made in the reports does not, however, suggest that student support and engagement were areas of weakness. On the contrary, it would be difficult not to see the number of concerns expressed by institutions about aspects of student relations as indicative of the attention they paid to this area of their work.

38 Regarding student representation, most comments cited from self-evaluation documents referred simply to what one institution described as the 'recruitment and involvement of student representatives'. In a few cases, institutional audit reports referred to comments drawn from self-evaluation documents on the difficulty of securing student representatives' involvement in meetings of faculty and sub-faculty committees. In some cases, such difficulties were seen as stemming from patterns of study, and in other cases to the particular topography of the institution. Very few self-evaluation documents appeared to contain criticisms of students. One audit report was wholly exceptional in citing a self-evaluation document's comments on difficulties with student representation which might have owed something to failings on the part of student representatives to report back to their peers.

39 In the areas of quality and academic standards arrangements:

- fewer than one-third of audit reports attributed critical comments on management information systems and associated arrangements to the self-evaluation document
- fewer than one-third of reports attributed critical comments on institutions' arrangements for external examiners and assessment to the self-evaluation document.

40 Only a small number of audit reports contained critical comments derived from self-evaluation documents relating to the following: engagement with the Academic Infrastructure; arrangements for collaborative provision; and involving alumni and employers in the work of institutions.

41 The following paragraphs develop further several of the more significant and prominent of the topics identified above. These are:

- quality management, including validation, approval, monitoring and review
- external examiners and assessment
- management information systems and related developments
- staff development, peer observation and appraisal.

42 More than a third of the institutional audit reports referred to comments from self-evaluation documents on general aspects of quality management. Most frequently these were about internal validation, monitoring and review, with critical comments in self-evaluation documents referring to the complexity of institutional arrangements. There were fewer references to difficulties in achieving coherence in the responsibilities of key individuals and committees; inconsistencies in implementing internal quality management arrangements; and communication difficulties between the awarding institution and a partner.

43 A substantial minority of audit reports referred to programme and module approval when citing self-critical comments from self-evaluation documents on the validation, approval, monitoring and review of courses, modules and programmes. There were somewhat fewer self-critical comments by institutions on their arrangements for annual monitoring of programmes, courses and modules, and on periodic review arrangements. A number of audit reports cited self-critical comments in self-evaluation documents on institutional arrangements for nominating, appointing, inducting and supporting external examiners. A similar number of reports cited critical comments on external examiners' reports and how the institution responded to them. In their self-evaluation documents, a small number of institutions identified weaknesses to be tackled in their arrangements for the assessment of students.

44 About one-fifth of the audit reports cited comments from self-evaluation documents on institutions' management information systems and their arrangements to collect data, produce statistics and use both to improve the management of quality and academic standards. In a few reports (on small institutions), comments cited from self-evaluation documents indicated institutions' awareness of the need for urgent attention to arrangements judged by them to be not fit for purpose. In other cases, audit reports on large, small and specialist institutions noted comments in self-evaluation documents acknowledging outstanding matters to do with management information systems.

45 When discussing institutions' arrangements for the support and development of their staff, a number of audit reports cited comments from the relevant self-evaluation documents. For example, one report noted the pithily expressed comment in the self-evaluation document that 'some established staff...[viewed attending training and development events]...as neither particularly relevant nor a good use of their time'. Several other reports cited comments in the relevant self-evaluation documents that securing good attendance at staff development events presented difficulties.

46 Several audit reports included comments from self-evaluation documents on the way in which peer observation of teaching had been encouraged and undertaken. Of these, a number cited comments from self-evaluation documents about unevenness in the take-up of peer observation across the institution, with the prospect that its potential to improve teaching might not be realised. Again, a similar number of reports noted that self-evaluation documents had flagged difficulties with unevenness of take-up regarding the appraisal of teaching staff.

Conclusions

47 Overall, the majority of the 70 institutional audit reports published between 2003 and November 2004 describe the institutions' self-evaluation documents as wholly or partially accurate and evaluative. While a minority are described as lacking in evaluation, the identification of significant inaccuracies in a self-evaluation document is exceptional. Most of the audit reports comment to the effect that the self-evaluation document provided a sound basis from which to commence the audit, with only a few self-evaluations exaggerating weaknesses or strengths in the relevant institution's arrangements.

Outcomes from institutional audit

48 In institutional audit, QAA invited its audit teams (at least initially) to view the degree to which a self-evaluation document described the institution's arrangements accurately - and offered an evaluative, self-critical pointer to the strengths and limitations of present arrangements - as an indicator of the institution's capacity to regulate its affairs, particularly the academic standards of its awards. In a number of cases, comments in the audit reports make it possible to identify such a positive link between the characteristics of the self-evaluation document and the confidence the audit team considered could be reposed in the institution's arrangements for quality and academic standards. In other cases, the audit report states that the self-evaluation document initially led the audit team to a less favourable view of the institution's capacity for critical self-evaluation than would be justified by reference to the content of its internal papers and discussions between the team and staff and students.

49 Analysis of references in the audit reports to self-critical observations in self-evaluation documents shows that about half the institutions mentioned the need to develop their quality management procedures and processes, particularly those linked to the approval of new provision. In addition, a substantial number of institutions saw the need to improve their management information systems. A number of reports note that the self-evaluation indicated institutions' perceptions of the need to undertake further work on their staff development arrangements.

50 More than one-fifth of the audit reports note comments from self-evaluation documents on the need to improve some aspect of institutions' arrangements for working with their external examiners. A much smaller number of reports note comments from self-evaluation documents on the need to improve assessment arrangements more generally.

51 Overall, communications between institutions and students (including personal tutoring, return of work and representation) is the topic which appears most frequently in the audit reports. However, the conclusion must be that the space devoted to student-related matters in self-evaluation documents, and the number of self-critical comments cited, points less to an overall weakness in this area than to institutions' overriding commitment to support their students to the best of their ability.

Appendix 1 - The institutional audit reports

2002-03

University College Chichester, February 2003¹
The Royal Veterinary College, February 2003
Cumbria Institute of the Arts, March 2003²
Institute of Education, University of London, March 2003
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, March 2003
Middlesex University, March 2003
Royal Academy of Music, March 2003
Royal College of Art, March 2003
University of Cambridge, April 2003
School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, April 2003
Bath Spa University College, May 2003³
University of Lincoln, May 2003
London Business School, May 2003
Newman College of Higher Education, May 2003
Norwich School of Art and Design, May 2003
Rose Bruford College, May 2003
Royal College of Music, May 2003
Royal Northern College of Music, May 2003
The School of Pharmacy, University of London, May 2003
College of St Mark and St John, May 2003⁴
The Surrey Institute of Art & Design, University College, May 2003⁵
Trinity and All Saints College, May 2003⁶
Trinity College of Music, May 2003⁷
Royal College of Nursing Institute, July 2003

2003-04

University of Bath, October 2003
University of Bradford, November 2003
University of Buckingham, November 2003
University of Essex, November 2003
University of Exeter, November 2003
University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, November 2003⁸
University of Sheffield, November 2003

Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, December 2003
Royal Agricultural College, December 2003
University of Southampton, December 2003
St Martin's College, Lancaster, December 2003⁹
University of Surrey, Roehampton, December 2003¹⁰
University of York, December 2003
University of East Anglia, January 2004
University of Durham, February 2004
University of Liverpool, February 2004
Writtle College, February 2004
Bournemouth University, March 2004
The Institute of Cancer Research, March 2004
University of Kent, March 2004
University of Leeds, March 2004
Loughborough University, March 2004
Open University, March 2004
University of Oxford, March 2004
University of Salford, March 2004
University of Warwick, March 2004
University of Wolverhampton, March 2004
Aston University, April 2004
University of Birmingham, April 2004
University of Bristol, April 2004
University of Central Lancashire, April 2004
Coventry University, April 2004
The London Institute, April 2004
University of Portsmouth, April 2004
Anglia Polytechnic University, May 2004¹¹
University of Brighton, May 2004
Brunel University, May 2004
University of Keele, May 2004
The Nottingham Trent University, May 2004
University of Reading, May 2004
University of Sussex, May 2004
Wimbledon School of Art, May 2004¹²

University of Greenwich, June 2004

King's College London, June 2004

University of Lancaster, June 2004

The Manchester Metropolitan University, June 2004

¹ Now the University of Chichester

² Now the University of Cumbria

³ Now Bath Spa University

⁴ Now the University College of St Mark and St John

⁵ Now the University College of the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester

⁶ Now Leeds Trinity and All Saints

⁷ Now Trinity Laban

⁸ Now The University of Manchester

⁹ Now the University of Cumbria

¹⁰ Now Roehampton University

¹¹ Now Anglia Ruskin University

¹² Now the University of the Arts, London

Appendix 2 - Reports on specialist institutions

The Royal Veterinary College, February 2003
Cumbria Institute of the Arts, March 2003¹³
Institute of Education, University of London, March 2003
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, March 2003
Royal Academy of Music, March 2003
Royal College of Art, March 2003
School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, April 2003
London Business School, May 2003
Newman College of Higher Education, May 2003
Norwich School of Art and Design, May 2003
Rose Bruford College, May 2003
Royal College of Music, May 2003
Royal Northern College of Music, May 2003
The School of Pharmacy, University of London, May 2003
The Surrey Institute of Art & Design, University College, May 2003¹⁴
Trinity and All Saints College, May 2003¹⁵
Trinity College of Music, May 2003¹⁶
Royal College of Nursing Institute, July 2003
Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, December 2003
Royal Agricultural College, December 2003
Writtle College, February 2004
The Institute of Cancer Research, March 2004
The London Institute, April 2004
Wimbledon School of Art, May 2004¹⁷

¹³ Now the University of Cumbria

¹⁴ Now the University College of the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester

¹⁵ Now Leeds Trinity and All Saints

¹⁶ Now Trinity Laban

¹⁷ Now the University of the Arts, London

Appendix 3 - Titles of *Outcomes from institutional audit papers, Series 1*

In most cases, *Outcomes...* papers will be no longer than 15 sides of A4. They are published on QAA's website to assist ready access. QAA retains copyright in the *Outcomes...* papers, but as noted earlier, they may be freely used with acknowledgement for research and educational purposes.

Titles of *Outcomes...* papers in the first series are listed below.

Title	Publishing date
Initial overview	April 2005
External examiners and their reports	April 2005
Programme specifications	April 2005
Staff support and development arrangements	October 2005
Student representation and feedback arrangements	November 2005
Programme monitoring arrangements	January 2006
Assessment of students	January 2006
Learning support resources, including virtual learning environments	January 2006
Validation and approval of new provision and periodic review	January 2006
Work-based and placement learning, and employability	March 2006
Arrangements for international students	March 2006
Progression and completion statistics	March 2006
Collaborative provision in the institutional audit reports	March 2006
Specialist institutions	July 2006
The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland	July 2006
Subject benchmark statements	September 2006
Arrangements for combined, joint and multidisciplinary honours degree programmes	October 2006
Institutions' work with employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies	October 2006
Academic guidance, support and supervision, and personal support and guidance	October 2006
Institutions' support for e-learning	November 2006

Institutions' frameworks for managing quality and academic standards	December 2006
Institutions' support for widening participation and access to higher education	December 2006
The contribution of the student written submission to institutional audit	March 2007
The adoption and use of learning outcomes	May 2007
The self-evaluation document in institutional audit	October 2007
Series 1 overview	October 2007

Appendix 4 - Methodology

The methodology followed in analysing the institutional audit reports uses the headings set out in Annex H of the *Handbook for institutional audit: England (2002)* to subdivide the Summary, Main report and Findings sections of the institutional audit reports into broad areas. An example from the Main report is 'The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision'.

For each published report, the text was taken from the Adobe Acrobat® documents published on the QAA website and converted to plain text format. The resulting files were checked for accuracy and coded into sections following the template used to construct the institutional audit reports. In addition, the text of each report was tagged with information providing the date the report was published and some basic characteristics of the institution (base data). The reports were then introduced into a qualitative research software package, QSR N6®. The software provides a wide range of tools to support indexing and searching and allows features of interest to be coded for further investigation.

An audit team's judgements, its identification of features of good practice, and its recommendations appear at two points in an institutional audit report: the Summary and at the end of the Findings. It is only in the latter, however, that cross references to the paragraphs in the Main report are to be found, and it is here that the grounds for identifying a feature of good practice, offering a recommendation and making a judgement are set out. These cross references have been used to locate features of good practice and recommendations to the particular sections of the report to which they refer.

Individual papers in the *Outcomes...* series are compiled by QAA staff and experienced institutional auditors. To assist in compiling the papers, reports produced by QSR N6® have been made available 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.

Analysis of self-evaluation documents provided by institutions to support institutional audit

For this particular enquiry, nodes (reference indexes) for the attributes 'evaluation' and 'accuracy' were constructed in QSR N6® and used to analyse text under the heading 'The utility of the SED as an illustration of the University's capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and limitations, and to act on these to enhance quality and standards'.

The text from each audit report coded at that node was then further coded to one node of the set 'evaluative/partly evaluative/not evaluative', and one node of the set 'accurate/partly accurate/not accurate', drawing on the text of the relevant paragraph(s). This showed that most audit reports clearly stated the audit team's view of the self-evaluation document.

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