



# **Outcomes from institutional audit**

## **Student representation and feedback arrangements**



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### Summary

Institutions are generally aware of the importance of enabling the participation of students in managing the quality of teaching, learning and the learning environment, and the need for representation arrangements to be periodically reviewed. Few institutions have the opportunity to organise their student representation arrangements from scratch, but rather more undertake periodic restructuring. When this is being planned, comments in the audit reports suggest that it might be useful to consider the impact of such changes on student representation arrangements and to ensure that the latter, and the institution's revised arrangements, are in alignment.

There is plentiful evidence that senior institutional managers take care to foster close links with student representative bodies in their institutions, some of which also convene scheduled meetings between students' union officers and their senior management team to discuss student-related matters. In some institutions, such close links extend to the inclusion of student members on high-level management and working groups.

Within institutions' formal committee arrangements, students are generally represented at the higher level by their elected officers and at operational level by representatives elected from students in departments, or following particular programmes of study or modules. At operational level, participation in the work of programme, departmental, school or faculty committees may be augmented by staff student consultative or liaison committees. It is clear that ensuring the proper representation of the views of part-time students and those studying off-campus is a challenge both for institutions and student representative bodies. Some institutions have made special arrangements to support the representation of students with particular needs, including mature students; those studying via flexible, blended or distance learning; students enrolled on combined honours programmes; postgraduate research; and international students, both those studying for the institution's awards overseas (for example with a partner institution) and in England.

Many institutions and their student representative bodies have experienced difficulties with ensuring that students take up the full range of their representation opportunities. This has stimulated the development of a number of initiatives designed to enhance student participation, including the appointment of student liaison officers and representation coordinators. Several institutions have developed transferable skills modules specially designed for student representatives which carry academic credit.

With respect to feedback, several reports identify the importance of ensuring that institutions 'close the loop' by informing their students about the actions that have been taken in response to the feedback they have provided. In several cases, reports have observed the value of central arrangements to analyse feedback from students and to identify common or distinct features. While there are several instances of systematic institutional arrangements to survey the views of graduates and employers, in the first 70 audit reports this appears to be an area ripe for further development.

Several reports identify the danger of overloading students with too many questionnaires and feedback opportunities. Comments in the first 70 reports indicated that a number of institutions were planning to review their internal feedback arrangements in the light of their experience of the National Student Survey.

### 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 audit* series, but since the final institutional audit reports in the present audit cycle will not be published until spring 2006, *Learning from institutional audit* is unlikely to be published before late 2006. To give institutions and other stakeholders more timely information, QAA has therefore 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...*).

A feature of good practice in institutional audit is considered to be a process, a practice, or a way of handling matters which, in the context of the particular institution, is improving, or leading to the improvement of, the management of quality and/or academic standards, and learning and teaching. *Outcomes...* papers are intended to provide readers with pointers to where features of good practice relating to particular topics can be located in the published audit reports. Each *Outcomes...* paper therefore identifies the features of good practice in individual reports associated with the particular topic and their location in the main report. Although all features of good practice are listed, in the interests of brevity not all are discussed in this paper. In the initial listing in paragraph 5, the first reference is to the numbered or bulleted lists of features of good practice at the end of each institutional audit report, the second to the relevant paragraphs in Section 2 of the Main Report. Throughout the body of this paper references to features of good practice in the institutional audit reports give the institution's name and the paragraph number from Section 2 of the Main Report.

It should be emphasised that the features of good practice mentioned in this paper should be considered in their proper institutional context, and that each is perhaps best viewed as a stimulus to reflection and further development rather than as a model for emulation. A note on the topics identified for the first series of *Outcomes...* papers, to be published throughout 2005, can be found at Appendix 3 (page 17).

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 the QAA website and cited, with acknowledgement.

### **Student representation and feedback arrangements: introduction and general overview**

1 This paper is based on a review of the outcomes of the first 70 institutional audits published by 5 November 2004 (see Appendix 1, page 14). A note on the methodology used to produce this and other papers in the *Outcomes...* series can be found in Appendix 4 (page 18).

2 Students are central both to the principal focuses of institutional audit and to the audit process itself. Hence, among other matters relating to the student learning experience, the audit reports describe and analyse student representation at operational and institutional level, and institutions' arrangements for obtaining feedback from students, graduates and employers. Students are invited to participate at various stages of the audit process: their representative body is invited to make a written submission to inform the audit and meetings with students are arranged during the briefing and audit visits to ensure that they have the opportunity to bring matters to the attention of the audit team. Further information on these matters can be found in the *Handbook for institutional audit*, paragraph 19 and Appendix H.

3 It is clear from the first 70 published audit reports that, in general, institutions are aware of the significance of representation and feedback arrangements to the experience of students as learners. The audit reports have found a general recognition that 'student representation is a key component of quality assurance in higher education in the twenty-first century', and that it is in the interests of individual institutions to listen and respond to the views of their students, presented either individually or through representatives. This is encapsulated in the observation in one report that a virtuous circle exists in that improvements to feedback arrangements have a positive impact on the recruitment and engagement of student representatives.

4 Features of good practice that relate to student representation are cited in 13 reports and those that relate to feedback arrangements by students, graduates and employers occur in 11 reports. Recommendations for action, the great majority of them of a desirable nature, are made in 25 reports and mainly relate to ways of enhancing the effectiveness of student representation, improving feedback arrangements to students and recognising the opportunities offered by engagement with graduates and employers.

#### **Features of good practice**

5 Consideration of the published institutional audit reports shows the following features of good practice in relation to student representation:

- the involvement of students in the work of the School's MBA Admissions Committee [London Business School, paragraphs 82 and 204 i,]
- student representation at all levels in the Academy's work [Royal Academy of Music, paragraphs 61 and 143 ii]
- UCC's involvement of students in its quality management arrangements through their representatives at institutional level [University College Chichester, paragraphs 58 bullet 4 and 129]

## Outcomes from institutional audit

- the extensive and effective representation of students and the School's willingness to innovate in order to enhance this [Norwich School of Art and Design, paragraphs 59-60 and 154 iv]
- the operation across the College of [Staff Student Advisory Committees] as a forum for the representation and consultation of students at subject level [Trinity and All Saints College, paragraphs 53 and 147 v]
- features of the University's support for its students including the care devoted to ensuring that the voices of students are heard in its quality management and academic standards arrangements [Aston University, paragraphs 74 and 253 ii]
- the design of the student representation system and the University's commitment to engaging students in quality management [University of Birmingham, paragraphs 64 and 225 ii]
- the high level of attendance by students where they have a representative role [University of Durham, paragraphs 59 and 212 bullet 4]
- the positive engagement with student representation at both institutional and school levels that extends to student membership of subject review panels [University of Exeter, paragraphs 81 and 266 i]
- the range of opportunities for students to become involved in many aspects of the University, at all levels of its operation [Lancaster University, paragraphs 85-89, 183, 189 and 238 bullet 1]
- the contribution of [Staff Student Liaison Committees] and [Staff Student Consultative Committees] across the University to quality management [Loughborough University, paragraphs 80 and 317 i]
- the effective engagement with [Coventry University Students' Union] representatives that extends beyond their active participation in formal and informal meetings to their involvement in project work and related activities [Coventry University, paragraphs 90, 134 and 273 ii]
- the variety of mechanisms used to hear the student voice, and the responsive way in which Roehampton has used these to enhance the student experience [University of Surrey, Roehampton, paragraphs 64, 75, 85, 103, 127 and 171 i].

6 Consideration of the published institutional audit reports shows the following features of good practice with respect to feedback arrangements:

- the way that the School obtains, and acts upon, feedback from its London-based masters students [London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraphs 55 and 134 ii]
- the School's overall responsiveness to informal and formal student feedback [The School of Pharmacy, University of London, paragraphs 74-75, 77, 124 and 159]
- the work of the Alumnus Relations Office and the CMC in integrating feedback on the School's provision from alumni, recruiters, former staff, and employers [London Business School, paragraphs 91 and 204 ii]
- module evaluation and reporting arrangements to students in some programmes [University College Chichester, paragraphs 58 bullet 5 and 131]

- the examples of good practice in the mechanisms for gaining student feedback and the opportunities provided for student participation [Newman College of Higher Education, paragraphs 83, 95 and 210 iii]
- the College's focus on students, and the attention that it gives to students' views [Rose Bruford College, paragraphs 32, 75, 76, 119 and 150 i]
- the regular use of college-wide staff and student surveys as sources of information for senior management and the ways in which the latter's response to the views expressed therein are fed back to the staff and student bodies [Trinity and All Saints College, paragraphs 52 and 147 iv]
- the gathering, analysing and acting upon feedback from students [University of Oxford, paragraphs 81, 83, 151, 156, 174 and 247 v]
- the systematic and comprehensive collection and use of feedback from students [Open University, paragraphs 84 and 207 iii]
- the way in which some areas draw on student feedback to enhance the curriculum [University of East Anglia, paragraphs 76 and 275 vii]
- the many links the University has developed and sustains with employers, for example, in the provision of placements and the development of the curriculum [Loughborough University, paragraphs 86, 247 and 317 ii].
- the comprehensive [Student Satisfaction Survey], the thorough consideration of its findings and the well-publicised and timely feedback of the results to both students and staff [University of Greenwich, paragraphs 95 and 270 ii].

### Themes

7 This part of the paper focuses on themes emerging from recommendations relating to student representation and feedback arrangements, to be found in the first 70 published institutional audit reports. These can be grouped into the following broad areas:

- meeting the expectations of students and engaging staff in representation and feedback arrangements
- ensuring that formal representation arrangements are appropriate, consistent and cover all students
- enhancing the effectiveness of student representation and feedback arrangements by disseminating good practice
- working in partnership with students' representative bodies to provide training and support for representatives
- improving systems for the collection and analysis of, and response to, feedback from students
- recognising the value of gathering systematic feedback from graduates, employers and other external stakeholders.

8 Institutions' appreciation of the benefits of effective student representation is clear from the audit reports. The following are typical observations from a range of reports: 'students play a critical part in the evaluation, development and enhancement

of both academic provision and the wider student experience'; 'student representation is an integral part of the [institution's] approach to enhancing academic quality and standards, with students being closely involved in decision making processes'; 'a strong belief in the mutual benefit derived from student involvement in [the institution's] governance'; 'the presence of student representatives on its committees is an essential means of establishing their full membership of the [institution] and their participation in decision making'; 'student representation is an essential element of the institution's quality assurance framework'.

9 In some cases, the opportunity for students to participate in decision-making through their elected representatives is enshrined in a Student Charter or Student Entitlement Framework, while in others students are made aware of their rights to representation in Student Handbooks or Guides for New Students. Overall, reports have observed that institutions' student representation systems are well established and kept under review. Although the design of student representation systems in one institution was identified as a feature of good practice, it might fairly be observed that few institutions have the opportunity to organise student representation from scratch; in some reports institutions are reminded to consider the impact of restructuring on student representation.

10 At institutional level, students are usually represented by officers of the students' union or an equivalent body on 'key' or 'appropriate' committees. In most cases 'appropriate' is defined as the governing body, Senate or the equivalent and the committees concerned with learning and teaching, quality assurance and the student experience in general. In only one or two cases have institutions been recommended to consider extending student representation to particular committees or boards.

11 When one audit team learned that the students' union had been pressing for representation on the senior management team, it responded that it was not clear to it, 'that this would be a practicable proposition or a good use of students' time'. In another institution, however, the audit team noted that both parties regarded the regular meetings of the students' union's executive with the University's senior management team as valuable. Similar meetings in another institution, with agendas set by the students' union, are said to have influenced major recent developments.

12 Outside formal committee structures at institutional level, there is clearly considerable informal contact between members of senior management teams and officers of the students' union. In some cases, this contact takes the form of scheduled monthly meetings between the President and the Vice-Chancellor or the member of the senior management team concerned with student affairs; in others, an 'open-door policy' means that meetings can be arranged when necessary.

13 In addition to representation on committees, many institutions include students on appropriate working groups, consultation exercises and focus groups. The decision-making activities identified in reports in which students have been represented include the selection of a vice-chancellor; academic staff appointing committees [Norwich School of Art and Design, paragraph 59]; the drafting of a new Human Resources Strategy; and admission to a master's course [London Business School, paragraph 82]. In identifying features of good practice, however, reports have tended to concentrate on the involvement of students either at all levels in the work of an institution or in its arrangements for the management of quality and standards.

14 On the reported assumption that 'student participation at departmental level may actually be the most meaningful', the majority of the codes of practice on student representation noted in audit reports relate to arrangements at programme level. These are intended to ensure that minimum standards are met for membership and the conduct of business of bodies such as staff-student liaison committees [University of Exeter, paragraph 78] while allowing 'detailed implementation to be determined by local need'. In one case the advantage of a code of practice on student representation was said to be the clarification for departments of their responsibilities, as distinct from those of students.

15 Student representation at operational level can take many forms: membership of programme or course committees; representation on departmental, school or faculty committees; and staff-student liaison, consultative or advisory committees. In two audit reports, the operation of staff-student committees is identified as a feature of good practice. In one case, the remit of staff-student advisory committees and their democratic operation was seen as 'an excellent model' for the 'representation and consultation of students at subject level' [Trinity and All Saints College, paragraph 53]. In the other, the audit team came to the view that staff-student liaison committees collectively 'made a distinctive and positive contribution to the institution's quality management and academic standards arrangements' [Loughborough University, paragraph 80].

16 Audit teams have noted that when staff are generally accessible and responsive to student concerns, formal arrangements for representation are supplemented, as at institutional level, by informal channels and contacts. In the same way, effective informal contact between staff and students can minimise 'the negative effects of an imperfect representation system' and good informal working relationships can overcome difficulties 'in relation to the more formal aspects of student representation'. One report, however, warned against over-reliance on informal channels which 'the team did not regard as a substitute for more formal and clearly defined systems'.

### Management of student representation

17 It is apparent that most institutions are aware of the importance of keeping systems for student representation under review, of monitoring them for consistency and effectiveness, and of strengthening and enhancing them. The establishment of new structures such as faculties or schools, the introduction of new quality management arrangements, or the expansion of programmes can offer convenient opportunities to review student representation at all levels.

18 Regular review of representation arrangements is desirable to ensure that no students are disadvantaged, especially in view of the growing diversity of the student body. Some student constituencies present particular difficulties. After meeting part-time students who were not aware of any representative arrangements available to them, an audit team considered that it would be desirable for the institution 'to review its student representation and induction arrangements'. In other areas, where straightforward representation is difficult to organise, special arrangements may be required, for example, for mature, distance learning, combined honours, postgraduate research and international students.

19 In several reports, institutions acknowledge that the process of student representation requires continuous monitoring to be effective. Some audit reports have observed considerable variety in arrangements at operational level, and this lack of consistency has been confirmed in student written submissions and by the mixed views of students who have met the teams. Attention is drawn in one report to the value to the institution 'of ensuring that an appropriate consistency of opportunity exists between different schools'. In another report, the institution is advised 'to ensure that its arrangements for student representation operate on a more consistent and effective basis'.

20 Consideration of the reports suggests that consistency of representation at operational level is more likely when there is not only institutional commitment to the active engagement of students in quality assurance matters, but also coordination and integration between different levels of student representation. The terms of reference of staff-student consultative committees in one institution suggested that they were formally linked to quality assurance systems and that items of concern were included on the agenda of the relevant institutional committees. In another institution, where the design of the student representation system was identified as a feature of good practice, staff-student committees are accountable to an Academic Board and are required to submit annual reports. These reports are reviewed by staff liaison contacts, 'committed and proactive' members of staff 'with responsibility for fostering and facilitating effective student representation' [University of Birmingham, paragraph 64].

21 It is clear from audit reports that most institutions are aware of the challenges involved in achieving consistent and effective student representation and wish to strengthen and enhance their arrangements. Although an institution's 'willingness to innovate' is only identified as a feature of good practice in one report [Norwich School of Art and Design, paragraph 154], there are numerous examples of initiatives designed to improve student representation arrangements and make participation more consistent and effective. These include the appointment of a student liaison officer to facilitate representation at both formal and informal levels; the employment of a full-time student representation coordinator and paid part-time course representative links; paid student advisers or academic liaison officers to complement and support elected student representatives; appointment of coordinators to monitor and evaluate the work of staff-student liaison committees; the inclusion of material on staff-student liaison in a transferable skills module to encourage recruitment of representatives; the development of a module on developing personal and professional skills through student representation; and the establishment of central student liaison or student affairs committees or councils.

22 A significant limitation to representation identified in several reports was a failure 'to close the loop' and provide feedback on the outcomes of student participation in decision-making to those not directly involved. In one report, in which the high level of attendance of student representatives was identified as a feature of good practice, it was noted that the institution was aware of the need to make clear 'the fruits of student representation' and was working on ways of achieving this, for example, by making committee minutes widely available and providing summaries of feedback and actions taken [University of Durham, paragraph 60]. Noting an observation by one institution that 'improvements to feedback arrangements may have a positive

impact on the recruitment of student representatives', the audit team encouraged the institution to continue to develop measures of providing information to 'help the student body appreciate the way in which their representatives are able to contribute to the enhancement of their learning opportunities'.

23 Problems frequently discussed in the published reports include the difficulty of recruiting student representatives and overcoming their reluctance to attend meetings regularly. Support for representatives can help to alleviate these difficulties and it is clear from the reports that it is most effective when it is offered in partnership with students' unions or the equivalent representative body. In one report, the effective engagement of the institution with students' union representatives is identified as a feature of good practice [Coventry University, paragraph 273]; in another, the audit report suggested it would be desirable for the institution to work more closely with the students' union to explore ways of supporting student representation.

24 Support for student representatives can take a variety of forms and the responsibility for providing it is divided between institutions and students' unions in a variety of ways. In some institutions the election of representatives is organised by the institution; in others, elections are the responsibility of the students' union. It appears from the reports that the training of representatives is usually undertaken by the students' union, but it is the responsibility of the institution to provide the names of representatives. Training programmes can sometimes include inducements such as the award of certificates for service. Induction and briefing on the business of committees is usually the responsibility of the institution.

### Handbooks and guides for student representatives

25 In one institution, a handbook for representatives is provided by the institution; in another, a handbook that explains the role of student representatives and gives 'clear practical guidance on issues they are likely to face' is produced by the students' union; in another, a Programme Representatives Handbook is produced in collaboration with the students' union; in yet another, the audit report noted the value of a programme leaders' pack, prepared by the students' union, 'in informing the student body and programme leaders respectively about the role and purpose of student representatives'. It was reported that in one institution the students' union has published an 'Essential student representatives' guide while the same institution had produced a 'Making the most of your student representative' guide for staff.

### Initiatives to enhance the effectiveness of student representation

26 Since institutional audit reports comment on the institutions' management of quality and academic standards, and since audit teams have no remit to comment on how student representative bodies carry out their responsibilities, it would be inappropriate for an audit report to identify aspects of the work of such a representative body as a feature of good practice. Where, however, the published reports have identified initiatives funded or supported by students' unions to remedy perceived deficiencies in student representation, these have usually been the focus for positive comments in the text. In one institution, for example, the students' union helps to fund a post of student representation coordinator; in another, departmental representatives are trained and paid by the students' union 'to improve

communication between students in departments and the union, to promote good practice and to assist in the conduct of elections for student representatives'. An Academic Council, the terms of reference of which include representing student opinion and making contributions to the formulation and implementation of academic policies, has been organised in one institution by the students' union to shadow senate [Lancaster University, paragraph 85]. Another report noted an initiative to enhance student participation in the form of the production of an annual report by a student union official, based on matters raised by students during student union meetings and through 'individual student interaction' with union officials.

27 Although some of the first 70 published reports have noted criticism of the operation of arrangements for student representation in student written submissions, and from students they have met, they have also noted examples of effective partnerships between institutions and students' unions to strengthen and enhance those arrangements. Student officers are described in one report as 'working partners' in meeting the challenges involved in providing an effective voice for a diverse student body. In another report the relationship of the institution's management and the students' union was described as one of 'trust, respect and pursuit of a common purpose'. One report shared the institution's confidence in the strength of student representation at individual, course and institutional levels and considered that the institution's support and respect for the students' union had led to a confident and positive body which has engaged actively in the affairs of the institution.

### Feedback arrangements for students, graduates and employers

#### Students

28 It is clear from the first 70 published audit reports that there is general recognition of the importance of collecting and responding to feedback from students on their experiences. Features of good practice identified in this area include 'overall responsiveness to informal and formal student feedback'; 'the systematic and comprehensive collection and use of feedback from students'; and 'the gathering, analysing and acting upon feedback from students'. Other features of good practice relate to the handling of specific aspects of student feedback, including obtaining and acting upon feedback from particular groups of students; examples of good practice in the collection and use of feedback in particular programmes; and the regular and effective use of mechanisms such as institution-wide surveys. Recommendations for action have related mainly to reviewing and improving existing systems and mechanisms for the collection and analysis of feedback from students, especially at institutional level, and to the timely communication of actions taken in response to feedback provided by students.

29 Several reports note the existence of well-established feedback policies, procedures or guidelines. In one case, the institution is reported to have developed its Student Feedback policy after an analysis of the purpose of feedback had identified 'enhancement of the learning experience' as the most important aspect. In another report, one of the key principles of a Student Representation and Feedback policy was said to be that 'all students, wherever or however they are undertaking formal studies, should have the opportunity to provide feedback on their learning experience'. In

several reports, however, institutions are reminded of the importance of keeping existing procedures under review and of monitoring them carefully. This ensures that they are being operated uniformly and to identify and disseminate good practice in the interests of consistency and enhancement.

30 At operational level, a variety of methods are employed to collect feedback from students on the quality of their learning experience but it appears that the module evaluation questionnaire, described by one institution as the 'bedrock' of its annual quality assurance process, is the most widely used; arrangements for the evaluation of entire programmes are less common and more variable. One audit team considered that mid-module evaluations, 'administered by some module leaders within an informal discursive context which allowed students to engage more meaningfully with the process and to see its impact', were an example of good practice in feedback mechanisms.

31 In operating feedback mechanisms at programme level, institutions have encountered some difficulties and particular challenges. A review of the published reports suggests that a systematic approach to, and central oversight of, the collection and analysis of feedback is necessary in order to make the best use of the material to enhance the student experience. Some students met by audit teams have complained of variability between programmes and of questionnaire 'fatigue' and 'overload'. Several audit reports have noted that the collection of feedback from some students presents a challenge; for example, part-time students, distance learners, students on placement and postgraduate research students.

32 At institutional level only the more compact institutions appear able to consult the student body as a whole in general meetings, but almost all have arrangements to survey their students on the whole or aspects of their experience. In two audit reports, the regular use of comprehensive institution-wide surveys as sources of information in the management of quality and standards are signalled as features of good practice [Trinity and All Saints College, paragraph 52; University of Greenwich, paragraph 95]. In another institution, the relevant report noted that 'the detailed data acquired from questioning students three times a year on all aspects of their lives was an invaluable resource for quality assurance and enhancement, in that it enables comparisons between schools and the identification of strength and weakness'. Many institutions have well-established student satisfaction surveys; others have only recently introduced them; in this connection, several were reported to be awaiting the commencement of the National Student Survey before revising their institutional level feedback arrangements.

33 Although the value of student surveys as a source of information for senior management is recognised, some problems with their operation have been identified in the first 70 audit reports: response rates are often low; the length of questionnaires covering the whole of the student experience can be off-putting; surveying different aspects of student life can result in 'survey saturation'. A range of responses to these difficulties has been reported: some institutions have experimented with web-based questionnaires, with varying success; others have concentrated on the experience of particular groups, such as international students; others have combined surveys with forums or focus groups [Open University, paragraph 84]. One institution has

addressed the danger of overloading students with calls for feedback by 'a rolling three-year cycle of formal student evaluations concerning various aspects of the university experience in turn'.

### How student feedback information is used by institutions

34 While it is clear that most institutions are aware of the importance of collecting feedback from students at both operational and institutional level, there appears to be more variability in the analysis and use of evaluations. In one case, an institution is encouraged 'to ensure greater consistency and transparency in the way student feedback is considered'. In another case, where staff appeared to be unclear as to which committees were responsible for follow-through of the results of a student satisfaction survey, and students appeared to know little of its findings, the report advised the institution to improve its systems for analysing feedback and acting upon it.

35 Just as the systematic analysis and effective use of feedback from students is important, so is the way in which resultant action is fed back to them. One report was able to describe how the institution was completing 'feedback loops' to students and staff by providing summaries and analyses, as well as a full report, on its student satisfaction survey: this was identified as a feature of good practice [University of Greenwich, paragraph 95]. In another case, however, the relevant institution was recommended to consider how it 'could improve the extent to which students feel that they are informed of the outcomes of the feedback they provide and the manner in which it is employed'. A few of the published reports have found that weaknesses observed in feedback to students are reflected in the content of the student written submissions received at the beginning of the process. Several reports stated that students commented on the lack of information about the results of feedback surveys and the reports have suggested that allowing students to see 'the impact of their involvement in quality management and assurance of standards' might improve the response rate to questionnaires.

### Feedback from graduates and employers

36 Few features of good practice have been identified in the area of feedback from graduates and employers. This may suggest that, in general, the contribution that stakeholders other than their students can make to the enhancement of quality and standards has yet to achieve widespread institutional recognition. This may be the case where successful initiatives could have been reported, for example, several reports have noted a tendency in self-evaluation documents to underplay the extent of the links the respective institutions had established with graduates and employers.

37 Links with graduates and employers appear to be strongest in small specialist institutions, where there are often close connections with the professions through tutor practitioners and visiting alumni and the external involvement of staff. The opportunity for employers and recent graduates to contribute to quality assurance processes in larger institutions seems mainly to be confined to vocationally orientated programmes, where professional body accreditation requirements and work placements ensure close links in the form of industrial liaison committees and similar advisory bodies.

38 At institutional level, contact with graduates and employers is often organised through alumnus relations offices and careers advisory services. While noting that such links can be effective, several reports encourage institutions to consider the value of more formal, systematic and qualitative feedback from graduates and employers.

### Conclusion

39 Taken together, the information from the 70 audit reports published by November 2004 suggests that institutions are responsive to the need to listen to the views of their students, presented either in individual feedback or by representatives at every level. Representation and feedback arrangements appear to work most effectively when they are reviewed regularly and when they are enhanced by the dissemination of good practice.

40 In the sector, there are many examples of successful partnerships between institutions and their student representative bodies in encouraging and supporting the participation of students in the management of quality and the maintenance of standards. On the whole institutions are aware of the need to 'close loops' by responding promptly to student feedback, both formal and informal.

41 In general, arrangements for the systematic collection, analysis and use of feedback from graduates and employers in order to enhance the student experience are less developed, but there is awareness of the advantages of engagement with a wide range of stakeholders.

## **Appendix 1 - The institutional audit reports**

### **2002-03**

University College Chichester, February 2003  
The Royal Veterinary College, February 2003  
Cumbria Institute of the Arts, March 2003  
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 2003  
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 2003  
The Surrey Institute of Art & Design, University College, May 2003  
Trinity and All Saints College, May 2003  
Trinity College of Music, May 2003  
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 2003  
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 2003

University of Surrey, Roehampton, December 2003  
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 2004  
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 2004  
University of Greenwich, June 2004  
King's College London, June 2004  
University of Lancaster, June 2004  
The Manchester Metropolitan University, June 2004

## **Appendix 2 - Reports on specialist institutions**

The Royal Veterinary College, February 2003  
Cumbria Institute of the Arts, March 2003  
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 2003  
Trinity and All Saints College, May 2003  
Trinity College of Music, May 2003  
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 2004

### Appendix 3 - Projected titles of *Outcomes...* papers

In most cases, *Outcomes...* papers will be no longer than 15 sides of A4. QAA retains copyright in the *Outcomes...* papers but, as noted earlier, they may be freely used, with acknowledgement.

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

Title	Publishing date (provisional)
Overview	April 2005
Programme specifications	April 2005
External examiners and their reports	April 2005
Staff support and development arrangements	October 2005
Learning resources (including virtual learning environments)	October 2005
Validation and approval and periodic review	October 2005
Student representation and feedback	October 2005
Academic advice, guidance and supervision	November 2005
Progression and completion statistics	December 2005
Annual monitoring	December 2005
Assessment	December 2005
Subject benchmarks	December 2005
The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland	January 2006
Institutions' frameworks for managing quality and standards	January 2006

## 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* 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 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.

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