QAA

Outcomes from institutional audit
Subject benchmark statements
Second series
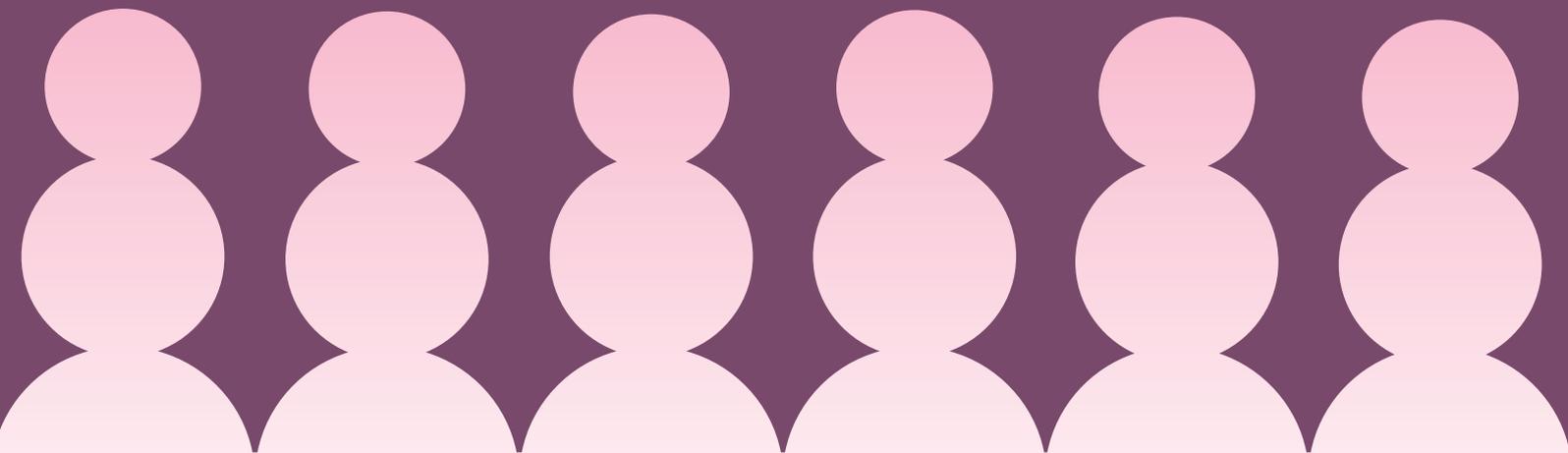
Sharing good practice

Summary

The subject benchmark statements are a key reference point for the development of the content of the curriculum through the guidance they provide on what constitutes the generally agreed core of individual disciplines and subject areas. They provide guidance on the learning outcomes a student graduating with an honours degree in a discipline or subject should be able to demonstrate. At the same time, they provide a reference point for the setting of the academic standards of individual awards, through the guidance they offer on assessment and intended learning outcomes and through links to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and programme specifications. The majority of subject benchmark statements have been published for qualifications at honours level, although a small number have been published for qualifications at master's level, and a generic qualification benchmark statement has been published for Foundation Degrees.

Institutional audit takes account of how subject benchmark statements are being used by institutions to review the curriculum and maintain academic standards. Almost all of the 59 institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006 provide evidence that institutions, their subject teams and departments had engaged with the statements. In many cases careful mapping ensured that the statements were clearly linked to individual programme specifications.

In good part, the success of this engagement by institutions and their staff has depended on the extent to which the use of the subject benchmark statements was firmly embedded in institutional quality assurance processes, and on the clarity of guidance provided in quality handbooks. Many audit reports noted positively the institutional guidance which ensures that elements of the Academic Infrastructure, including the statements, were considered in programme approval, validation and revalidation procedures. It is clear that institutions' approaches to the statements were genuine rather than paper exercises.

Several features of good practice refer to the use of subject benchmark statements, including their use in grading criteria and curriculum development. Other reports contain recommendations, which refer to the need to establish clearer links between the statements and programme specifications, and to ensure a more positive engagement with the statements themselves.

While almost all institution-level quality systems and most disciplines were making effective use of the subject benchmark statements, variations were observed between disciplines. Nonetheless, for the most part programme specifications were being mapped against or were aligned with the statements, in line with guidance on devising assessment criteria, curriculum development and developing intended learning outcomes.

Where audit reports discuss the development and management of joint honours programmes, interdisciplinary programmes, and programmes leading to several awards, there is evidence that institutions and their staff have encountered difficulties in using subject benchmark statements. At the time that the audits were being conducted, only a few subject benchmark statements at master's level had been produced. Nonetheless there was some evidence that disciplines with taught

postgraduate provision were engaging actively with other elements of the Academic Infrastructure, and with other appropriate reference points. Where reports refer to Foundation Degrees, it was found that, with few exceptions, the relevant qualification benchmark statement had been fully used in designing and constructing the programmes.

The audit reports provide growing evidence that institutions were coming to view the individual elements of the Academic Infrastructure as key reference points for their quality and academic standards arrangements. For the most part, disciplines were engaging well with relevant subject benchmark statements, although engagement at this level did not always extend to an awareness of some other elements of the Academic Infrastructure.

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'. To provide institutions and other stakeholders with access to timely information on the findings of its institutional audits, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) produces short working papers that describe features of good practice and summarise recommendations from the audit reports. Since 2005 these have been published under the generic title *Outcomes from institutional audit* (hereafter, *Outcomes...*). The first series of these papers drew on the findings of the audit reports published between 2003 and November 2004. This paper is based on the findings of the institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006. It includes a brief section at the end of the paper which compares its key features with those of its predecessor in the first series of *Outcomes...* papers.

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 6, 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 and second series of *Outcomes...* papers can be found at Appendix 3 (page 16).

As noted above, this second series of *Outcomes...* papers is based on the 59 institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006, and the titles of papers are in most cases the same as their counterparts in the first series. A note on the methodology used in this and other papers in the *Outcomes…* series can be found at Appendix 4. Like the first series of *Outcomes...* papers, those in the second 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.

Introduction and general overview

1   This paper is based on a review of the outcomes of the 59 institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006 (see Appendix 1, page 12). A note on the methodology used to produce this and other papers in this second *Outcomes...* series can be found in Appendix 4 (page 18).

2   Since 1997 QAA has worked with subject communities to develop a series of subject benchmark statements to provide institutions, their staff and students with guidance on what constitutes the generally agreed core of individual disciplines and subject areas, and the learning outcomes a student graduating with an honours degree in a discipline or subject should be able to demonstrate. The statements are therefore key reference points for the content of the curriculum. At the same time, through the guidance they offer on assessment and learning outcomes and links to the FHEQ and programme specifications, subject benchmark statements provide guidance for staff setting the standards of individual academic awards. Scrutiny of how the statements are being used by institutions to review the curriculum and maintain academic standards is therefore a central feature of institutional audit.

3   During the period covered by this paper, QAA's guidance to audit teams directed them to consider the subject benchmark statements in a number of different parts of the audit report. Audit teams were asked to consider the use made of the statements and the FHEQ in programme approval, monitoring and review. Furthermore, under the heading 'External reference points', teams were advised to consider the institution's approach to the statements and to other elements of the Academic Infrastructure, and the extent to which this approach was timely and appropriate. Finally, in the discipline audit trails, teams were advised to consider the extent to which programme specifications were clearly linked to relevant statements, to the FHEQ, and to relevant sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*.

4   Four audit reports identify features of good practice making particularly positive reference to subject benchmark statements; recommendations appear in a slightly larger number of reports. To date 56 statements have been published at honours level and nine at master's (M) level. Not surprisingly fewer references to the statements were found where audit reports related to institutions with mainly postgraduate provision. QAA has recently reviewed the existing honours level statements and is extending subject benchmarking to new discipline areas through its recognition scheme. In addition a generic qualification benchmark statement for Foundation Degrees has also been published (2004).

5   In addition to those audit reports containing features of good practice or recommendations linked to the subject benchmark statements, a number of others contain broader comments concerning engagement with the Academic Infrastructure as a whole. It has not always been simple to extract references to these broader statements as the individual elements of the Academic Infrastructure are intended to be complementary. Readers should refer to papers in this series on *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *Programme specifications*.

Features of good practice

6   Identifying features of good practice in connection with subject benchmark statements has not been straightforward, in part because of the reasons cited above. The audit reports considered here have tended to include positive reference to the use of the statements in features of good practice on wider matters. In the following list, features of good practice making particularly positive reference to the use of statements are quoted, along with the paragraphs specifically relating to subject benchmark statements:

- the role of the [Educational Development Committee] in supporting and leading developments in teaching and learning, and its work with departments to spread good practice [Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, paragraph 215 ii; paragraphs 43, 47, 48 and 99]

    '…a detailed and rigorous appraisal process which aims to lighten the load on the validation panel, enabling it to concentrate on its core considerations of rationale, aims, compliance with College regulations and accordance with subject benchmark statements and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ)...' [paragraph 47]

- the development of templates for the formative assessment of dissertations in the Department of Fashion [American InterContinental University - London, paragraphs 217 iii; paragraph 167]

    'The team found that programme specifications were being well used in the construction of the subject-specific grading criteria, and that assessment is well calibrated against the statements in the *Subject benchmark statement* for Art and Design' [paragraph 167]

- the way in which industrial placements for students at the College are managed, supported and integrated within the curriculum [Harper Adams University College, paragraph 189 v; paragraphs 73, 88, 113, 116 and 145]

    '…use by the College of several subject benchmark statements and the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies...as reference points for innovative curriculum areas was indicative of a sophisticated use of external reference points' [paragraph 73]

- the College's approach to external examiners and their reports [Henley Management College, paragraph 213 ii; paragraphs 54-69]

    'The SED claimed, and the audit team was able to confirm that the master's level *Subject benchmark statement* in business and management and the FHEQ 'M' level descriptors were used extensively in the development of programme Specifications' [paragraph 68].

7   A number of audit reports draw positive attention to aspects of institutional approaches to subject benchmark statements without referring to them in features of good practice. These include:

- University of Chester [paragraphs 39, 55 and 107]
- University of Leicester [paragraphs 44, 78, and 79]

- University of Newcastle [paragraphs 22, 56, 75, 168 and 193]
- University of Nottingham [paragraphs 44, 58, 68 and 147]
- London South Bank University [paragraphs 32, 51, 115 and 146]
- University of Sunderland [paragraphs 67, 70 and 143].

Themes

8   This section focuses on themes emerging from references to subject benchmark statements in the audit reports. These themes can be grouped into the following broad areas:

- institutional engagement with subject benchmark statements
- the use of subject benchmark statements at discipline level
- embedding subject benchmark statements within quality assurance and enhancement procedures
- links between subject benchmark statements and other elements of the Academic Infrastructure.

Institutional engagement with subject benchmark statements

9   Subject benchmark statements set out expectations in a range of subject areas, providing academic staff with a point of reference in the design and development of degree programmes and a framework for specifying intended learning outcomes. The statements are also one of a number of external sources of information that can be drawn upon for the purposes of both internal and external review.

10   Many institutional audit reports note the view taken by the institution that its approach to quality assurance and enhancement, and to securing the standards of its awards, was informed by a number of key external reference points, including the subject benchmark statements. As with most other elements of the Academic Infrastructure, the statements are designed to be developmental rather than prescriptive in character, with active engagement rather than passive compliance encouraged. The reports tended to describe this engagement by use of phrases such as 'make reference to...', 'take account of...', 'subjects are expected to be familiar with...', 'fully incorporate...', 'programmes are aligned with...', 'engage with...', 'account is taken of...', and 'guided by...'.

11   Many audit reports identify a positive engagement with subject benchmark statements at institutional level. For example, one report noted the institution's belief that 'the development of programme specifications has facilitated constructive debate on the relevance of benchmark statements and external reference points'. Another report cited the institution's comment that 'the challenge is to ensure that activities and actions that derive from the oversight of these systems are sufficiently reflective and responsive to preserve and enhance processes, quality and standards'. A number of reports noted the view taken by the institution that there was an increasing integration of the Academic Infrastructure, including the subject benchmark statements, into institutional quality processes, and that the statements

were deployed in the development of programmes, modules and their related specifications. The reports generally confirm that there is justification for such claims, commenting favourably on how quality handbooks and institutional intranets provided clear and detailed guidance to disciplines. In most instances staff were reported as having demonstrated an awareness of the statements and to have used them as a source of reference in articulating and reviewing aims and intended learning outcomes, and in supporting curriculum development and assessment.

12   The audit reports indicate that scrutiny of documentation, including quality handbooks, papers for approval and validation, and for annual and periodic reviews, confirmed the accuracy of most claims about the use of subject benchmark statements, albeit with variations in the degree of engagement. For example, one report noted that the use of the statements had not been included in formal processes, and that the institution did not seem to have responded collectively to their development (see paragraph 23). In the case of another institution, which described the use of the statements as 'firmly established in the programme approval and periodic review processes', the report noted that this did not in fact extend to some longer-established programmes, and this contributed to a recommendation on to develop programme specifications with clear articulation between learning outcomes and assessment. A number of reports demonstrate that institutions were using the statements to assure the quality of provision or academic standards, and, for the most part, to enhance provision. One report noted that although 'timely and appropriate' use of the Academic Infrastructure was being made, the approach taken was one of 'compliance' and that this missed opportunities to engage more proactively with these reference points for the purposes of enhancement.

The use of subject benchmark statements at discipline level

13   Many institutional audit reports indicate that, for the most part, central quality systems and most disciplines had robustly embraced the use of subject benchmark statements. The reports show that programme specifications can illuminate the manner in which subject knowledge and skills identified in the statements are mapped on to the curriculum and the assessment process. The use of the statements in the production of programme specifications is frequently commented upon. One report noted, for example, that 'programme specifications provided clear evidence that the subject benchmark statements for [a named discipline] had been drawn upon in their construction and were explicitly stated for [an aspect of that discipline]. Disciplines are reported to have found the statements useful. In one case they were described as 'often a positive and useful reference point for curriculum design', while in another institution an improved alignment with one statement had led to the introduction of a compulsory module at level 3 for some pathways.

14   Some audit reports are unequivocally complimentary about the use of the subject benchmark statements at discipline level, referring to excellent mapping between curriculum, intended learning outcomes and the relevant statements. The notion of active engagement and enhancement deriving from use of the statements is invariably supported and encouraged when it is found - as in, for example, the case of a discipline which described its approach to the relevant statement as 'interpretive in that, to maintain a distinctive ethos and approach, it is used as a reference point

for defining student achievement within innovative courses providing a diverse range of developmental opportunities'. Another report found that '...programme specifications were being well used in the construction of the subject-specific grading criteria, and that assessment is well calibrated against the statements in the Subject benchmark statement for Art and Design' [American InterContinental University - London, paragraph 167]. A number of reports note that assessed student work met the expectations of the relevant statements.

15   Naturally, engagement with the subject benchmark statements has not always been straightforward, sometimes for reasons beyond institutions' control. In the case of M level programmes without relevant statements, there are examples of disciplines relating their provision to other reference points, including the FHEQ or institutional level descriptors, or those published by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), or indeed by subject communities themselves. In most cases where audit reports refer to Foundation Degrees, there is evidence of institutions making explicit reference to the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. Situations where difficulties have been identified include those where undergraduate programmes have had to make use of two or more statements, for example in joint honours programmes, interdisciplinary programmes or programmes leading to several awards. In one example, for a programme that related to two statements, it was not clear whether the entirety of the statements, or just sections of them, had been used and in another it was acknowledged that the use of the statements could be problematic for vocational/technical training contexts provided by affiliates.

16   In some disciplines, the audit reports suggest that the use of subject benchmark statements was not always explicit. In several cases where programme specifications contained no specific reference to the relevant statements, the reports noted that there was other evidence of their use in the development of the curriculum. In other cases, the reports noted that a greater engagement with the relevant statements would be appropriate. In one case the report made reference to the fact that not all programme specifications described how the statements informed the curriculum and assessment; another could find no reference to the statements in a discipline self-evaluation document; another again drew the attention of the institution to the benefits which could derive from more explicit engagement with the Academic Infrastructure in a named discipline.

17   Similarly, a recommendation stemmed from the variability in the extent to which disciplines addressed the Academic Infrastructure, which was found to limit the usefulness of programme specifications. The same report, while expressing uncertainty about the institution's management of the use of the subject benchmark statements at discipline level, noted that this was being clarified, and in some cases developed. On the theme of progress, another report commented that an institution's course templates, which had not previously referred to the statements, were doing so by the time of the audit.

Embedding subject benchmark statements within quality assurance and enhancement procedures

18   Overall, most institutional audit reports indicate that institutions engaged appropriately with the Academic Infrastructure, and that doing so formed a key part of their quality assurance and enhancement strategies: indeed one report noted that the *Code of practice*, the FHEQ and the subject benchmark statements had 'materially influenced the development of the [institution's] academic infrastructure'. Most reports also confirm that validation and revalidation procedures were conducted in line with institutional requirements to refer to the statements.

19   Many audit reports make reference to the incorporation of guidance on the use of subject benchmark statements into quality manuals and to their consequent impact on quality procedures. For example, in one institution programme teams were required to demonstrate how the statements had been incorporated into award structures at validation, revalidation and review, and the programme specification template required explicit mapping of level learning outcomes and award outcomes against the relevant statements. In several institutions staff development activities are reported as having been arranged to familiarise staff with the use of the statements and to share good practice.

20   Institutional approval, validation and review procedures normally require a commentary on the proposal's articulation with the Academic Infrastructure, including the subject benchmark statements. Templates for validation documents and for programme specifications are often used to ensure that reference is made to the statements and to the FHEQ. One report noted how programme proposal documentation was enhanced by direct reference to the statements and the FHEQ. In another the institution was judged to have 'a detailed and rigorous [final educational] appraisal process which aims to lighten the load on the validation panel, enabling it to concentrate on its core considerations of rationale, aims, compliance with College regulations and accordance with subject benchmark statements' [Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, paragraph 47]. A number of reports refer to requirements for external subject specialists to comment on the extent to which programmes met the expectations of the relevant statements, while others refer to panels being provided with relevant statements in the course of approval, validation and review procedures. One report, however, noted an instance of a programme beginning operations before having demonstrated its mapping against the relevant statements, which had been a condition of approval. This report made a number of recommendations about the operation of programme approval mechanisms.

21   Where disciplines are expected to comply with PSRB requirements, it is clear that the subject benchmark statements are regarded as complementary reference points. One report, for example, noted the sophisticated use of reference points and the 'use by the College of several subject benchmark statements and the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies...as reference points for innovative curriculum areas' [Harper Adams University College, paragraph 73].

22   A number of audit reports refer to institutions' continual monitoring of the use of subject benchmark statements, for example, by having boards of studies ensure that programme specifications are mapped against them. Many institutions offer guidance

to help external examiners comment on the congruence of the award programme with external reference points and confirm that programmes adhere to external standards of quality, including the subject benchmark statements. For example, one institution drew external examiners' attention to the need to take into account the level descriptors of the institution's credit framework and the relevant statements, as well as the need to compare levels of student performance with those of equivalent programmes elsewhere, and to comment upon the process of assessment. Strength was found in one institution's arrangements for monitoring at institutional level where 'the [institution] continues to maintain its policies and procedures under continuous review in the context of sector wide requirements, initiatives and revisions to the Academic Infrastructure'.

23   One report made a number of recommendations in which subject benchmark statements were considered relevant. The institution was recommended to develop specific procedures for developing, presenting, considering and approving significant changes to particular categories of programmes, with appropriate reference to the Academic Infrastructure. The report also found that an external advisor had had no opportunity to comment on programme alignment with the statements and the FHEQ, and the institution was recommended to make use of such advisors to assure that the standards and quality of proposed programmes were appropriately aligned with the FHEQ and the relevant statements.

Links between subject benchmark statements and other elements of the Academic Infrastructure

24   As noted above (see paragraphs 2, 3 and 5) the component parts of the Academic Infrastructure are designed to be complementary, and the institutional audit reports describe and analyse how institutions have engaged with the range of external reference points. It appears from the reports that, during the period discussed in this paper, many institutions regarded all elements of the Academic Infrastructure as key factors in the development of their quality systems, and included detailed references to their application in quality handbooks and guidance documents. On the other hand, several reports comment on a more varied approach at local level, and the fact that some disciplines that had engaged with the statements showed less cognisance of other aspects of the Academic Infrastructure, including the FHEQ and *Code of practice*. This is further discussed in the paper on the FHEQ in this series. It appears, therefore, that the subject benchmark statements are one of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure with which familiarity at this level is greatest.

The findings of this paper compared with its counterpart in the first series of *Outcomes...*

25   Overall, the papers on this topic in the first and second series of *Outcomes...* both point to the willingness of many institutions to engage with the subject benchmark statements, and to use them in developing quality assurance and enhancement systems. The current paper suggests that the use of the statements is well embedded in institutional processes and that in this sense institutions are at a more advanced stage in their engagement than was the case previously.

26   Both papers identify the use of the subject benchmark statements by most disciplines. In particular, the audit reports reviewed for this study provide a number of examples of the statements being used to enhance the curriculum and assessment. Both papers note some variation in their use at this level, despite requirements laid down in institutional quality procedures, and both papers also note that not all the discipline areas which did make use of the statements were similarly comfortable with other parts of the Academic Infrastructure.

Conclusion

27   A consideration of the institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006 suggests that the use of the subject benchmark statements is embedded in institutions' quality assurance and enhancement processes. Institutions do not appear to regard the statements as demanding strict compliance, rather they are used creatively and as guides to develop quality processes and academic curricula. The reports provided many examples of the use of statements at discipline level in the development of the curriculum and assessment and in the production of programme specifications. Some variations were, however, evident at this level. The use of the statements can create some difficulties for provision such as interdisciplinary and joint award programmes. Many M level programmes without relevant statements sought to align their provision with the FHEQ and with other reference points. The subject benchmark statements appear to be one of the best known elements of the Academic Infrastructure at discipline level.

Appendix 1 - The institutional audit reports

Note

In the period covered by these papers a number of institutions underwent a variety of scrutiny procedures for taught degree awarding powers, university title and research degree awarding powers. Reports of the individual scrutiny processes were provided to QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers, and its Board of Directors, and formed the basis for advice to the Privy Council on the applications made by the respective institutions.

In most cases the scrutiny processes also provided information which, in the form of a bespoke report, QAA accepted as the equivalent of an institutional audit report. Only those reports which conform to the general pattern of the institutional audit reports are included in the list below.

2004-05

City University

Cranfield University

University of Hull

University of Leicester

University of Newcastle upon Tyne

University of Nottingham

The Queen's University of Belfast

University of Surrey

University of Ulster

Goldsmiths College, University of London

Queen Mary, University of London

Royal Holloway and Bedford New College (Royal Holloway, University of London)

University of London

University College London

Birkbeck College, University of London

Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine (Imperial College London)

St George's Hospital Medical School

University of Derby

De Montfort University

University of Gloucestershire

University of Hertfordshire

Sheffield Hallam University

University of Huddersfield

Kingston University

London Metropolitan University

Leeds Metropolitan University

Liverpool John Moores University

University of Luton[1]

University of Northumbria at Newcastle

Oxford Brookes University

University of Plymouth

Staffordshire University

London South Bank University

University of Sunderland

University of Teesside

University of East London

University of the West of England, Bristol

University of Westminster

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College[2]

Canterbury Christ Church University College[3]

University of Chester

Liverpool Hope University

University College Winchester[4]

Henley Management College[5]

---

[1] Now the University of Bedfordshire
[2] Now Buckinghamshire New University
[3] Now Canterbury Christ Church University
[4] Now the University of Winchester
[5] Now merged with the University of Reading

Harper Adams University College

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

American InterContinental University - London

2005-06

University of Manchester

Courtauld Institute of Art

Heythrop College

University of London External System

London School of Economics and Political Science

The University of Bolton

Thames Valley University

University of Central England in Birmingham[6]

University of Worcester

Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies

Dartington College of Arts[7]

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth

---

[6] Now Birmingham City University

[7] Now part of the University College Falmouth

Appendix 2 - Reports on specialist institutions

2004-05

Birkbeck College, University of London

Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine (Imperial College London)

St George's Hospital Medical School

Henley Management College

Harper Adams University College

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

American InterContinental University - London

2005-06

Courtauld Institute of Art

Heythrop College

University of London External System

London School of Economics and Political Science

Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies

Dartington College of Arts

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth

Appendix 3 - Titles of *Outcomes* from institutional audit papers, Series 2

In most cases, *Outcomes...* papers will be no longer than 20 sides of A4. Projected titles of *Outcomes...* papers in the second series are listed below in provisional order of publication.

The first series of papers can be found on QAA's website at www.qaa.ac.uk/enhancement

Titles

Institutions' frameworks for managing quality and academic standards

Progression and completion statistics

Learning support resources (including virtual learning environments)

Assessment of students

Work-based and placement learning, and employability

Programme monitoring arrangements

Arrangements for international students

Institutions' work with employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

Recruitment and admission of students

External examiners and their reports

Collaborative provision in the institutional audit reports

Institutions' arrangements to support widening participation and access to higher education

Institutions' support for e-learning

Specialist institutions

Student representation and feedback

Academic guidance, support and supervision, and personal support and guidance

Staff support and development arrangements

Subject benchmark statements

The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Programme specifications

Arrangements for combined, joint and multidisciplinary honours degrees programmes

The adoption and use of learning outcomes

Validation and approval of new provision, and its periodic review

The self-evaluation document in institutional audit

The contribution of the student written submission to institutional audit

Institutions' intentions for enhancement

Series 2: concluding overview

Appendix 4 - Methodology

The analysis of 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 is taken from the report published on QAA's website and converted to plain text format. The resulting files are checked for accuracy and coded into sections following the template used to construct the institutional audit reports. In addition, the text of each report is 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 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 *Outcomes...* papers are compiled by QAA staff and experienced institutional auditors. To assist in compiling the papers, reports produced by QSR N6® are made available to authors to provide a broad picture of the overall distribution of features of good practice and recommendations in particular areas, as seen by the audit teams.