QAA

Outcomes from institutional audit

Recruitment and admission of students

Second series

Sharing good practice

Summary

The 59 institutional audit reports considered in this paper, covering the period November 2004 to August 2006, showed that, in general, institutions had satisfactory arrangements for recruiting and admitting students. The policies they used were monitored and implemented, and the information they provided for applicants was, with few exceptions, fair, accurate and comprehensive.

Features of good practice relating to recruitment and admissions were cited in nine audit reports. They identified strengths in outreach activity, the use of management information systems to monitor recruitment and admissions, and the care with which procedures for admitting students had been carried out. There were recommendations relating to recruitment and admissions in 10 reports.

Although the audit reports indicated that the section of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*), concerning recruitment and admissions had received attention, it did not appear to have played a prominent part in the arrangements institutions had made for developing and monitoring their policies and procedures. The need to widen participation in higher education had, however, been important in many institutions' strategic thinking and was often a feature of their mission statements. To a large extent, this had ensured that institutions had satisfied the intention of the *Code of practice* that the policies and procedures they used to attract, recruit and admit students were clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

The management information systems used by institutions contain data concerning recruitment and admissions, and many of the audit reports considered the ways in which these data were used to monitor the effectiveness of the policies and procedures institutions have adopted. Trends can be analysed, and changes in the demand for places can be observed. Information about the qualifications of those admitted also contributes to the assurance of academic standards. The audit reports show that, although there had been improvements in the use of these data and that there was some good practice, some institutions had yet to establish systems providing good quality reliable data and to use them to inform the development of policy and procedure.

The audit reports considered students' experience of published information, including information made available to prospective students with a view to ensuring the accuracy of publicity and promotional material and that it does not mislead potential students. In more than a fifth of the audit reports, staff with marketing and public relations functions were stated to have editorial responsibilities for published information for prospective students. The reports identified only one case, however, where publicity information provided to prospective students had been seriously misleading. With this exception, meetings with students and the student written submissions provide evidence that most students were satisfied that the information they received had been fair, accurate and comprehensive.

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, 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 audit reports published between 2003 and November 2004. This paper is based on the findings of institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006.

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. 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 QAA's website. For those institutions where a change of name has subsequently taken place, this is noted in Appendix 1 (page 17), and is the correct name at the time of publication of this paper.

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 this second series of *Outcomes...* papers can be found at Appendix 3 (page 21).

As noted above, this second series of *Outcomes...* papers is based on the 59 institutional audit reports published by August 2006, and the titles of papers are in most cases the same as their counterparts in the first series of *Outcomes…* papers. 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 QAA's website and cited, with acknowledgement.

Introduction and general overview

1   This *Outcomes…* paper is based on the 59 institutional audits published between November 2004 and August 2006 (see Appendix 1, page 17). A note on the methodology used to produce this and other papers in the *Outcomes…* series can be found in Appendix 4 (page 23).

2   Although QAA's template for the institutional audit report did not prompt audit teams to comment in detail on institutions' arrangements for recruiting and admitting students, most of the 59 reports considered in this paper included references to some aspects of those arrangements. Successful recruitment is an important aim for all institutions and these reports show that, in general, careful attention was being paid to developing and monitoring policies intended to ensure that this aim is met. For many institutions, widening participation in higher education and ensuring fair access for underrepresented groups were, and are, prominent features of admissions policies. This was reflected in the information provided by institutions to support the audit process and was noted in several audit reports.

3   The *Handbook for institutional audit: England* (2002) anticipated that in commenting on institutions' arrangements for quality and academic standards, audit reports would also comment on how they had drawn on the advice of the *Code of practice*, one section of which is concerned with the recruitment and admission of students to higher education programmes [*Handbook for institutional audit: England* (2002) paragraph 12; QAA's *Code of practice, Section 10: Recruitment and admissions* (2001) revised as *Admissions to higher education (2006)*]. Although there are only a few explicit references to this Section of the *Code of practice* in the reports, several of the features of good practice and recommendations in the reports relate to its Precepts.

4   QAA also expected audit teams to comment in the reports on the measures institutions were taking to ensure the accuracy, completeness and reliability of the information they make available about their provision, including information for prospective students. Almost all the audit reports therefore refer to such information, many drawing on information from meetings with students and from the student written submissions to comment on the match between the information provided for prospective students and the experience of studying at the institution [*Handbook for institutional audit: England* (2002) paragraphs 35 and 44].

5   The information made available to audit teams included published quantitative data on student entry qualifications [*Handbook for institutional audit: England* (2002) Annex E]. These reports showed that quantitative information concerning recruitment and admissions was often discussed with staff at an institutional level and in the discipline audit trails. The discussions often occurred in the context of a wider consideration of the data used to monitor the progress, achievement and completion of students. Accordingly, some of the material referred to in this *Outcomes…* paper is also referred to in the *Outcomes…* papers which consider *Progression and completion statistics* and *Programme monitoring arrangements.*

Features of good practice

6   Features of good practice in relation to recruitment and admissions cited in the institutional audit reports reflect strengths in outreach activity and widening participation; the use of management information systems to support recruitment and admissions processes; the inclusion of recruitment processes in approaches to the assurance of the student learning experience; administrative support for students applying for distance learning programmes of study; the induction of newly recruited students; and the inclusion of admissions processes in inculcating a commitment by students to an institution's particular ethos. The features of good practice included:

● the College's approach to outreach activity, exemplified by the INSPIRE [Innovative Scheme for Post-doctoral research assistants in Research and Education] project and the collaboration with Thames Valley University [this referred to a project that employs postdoctoral research assistants to spend part of their time in partner schools providing teaching and assistance with the delivery of the science curriculum, and an arrangement allowing students who satisfactorily complete a foundation year in a partner institution to be admitted to study for a medical degree] [Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, paragraph 302 iv; paragraph 149 and 151]

● the [University's] retention strategy: its development, implementation and review with the full engagement of staff and students [University of Derby, paragraph 294 third bullet; paragraph 123]

● the process [the University] has developed to support the withdrawal of fields [on the basis of actual or projected student recruitment while safeguarding the interests of students] [University of Gloucestershire, paragraph 316 iv; paragraph 78]

● the establishment of GENESIS, a highly effective system which delivers timely and reliable management information to support institutional monitoring and planning [including admission and progression statistics for use in the Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports] [University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 204 iii; paragraph 79]

● the use [the University] makes of its [Applicant and Student Information System] at the level of the individual student…and to analyse patterns and trends in progression and completion in some areas [University of Huddersfield, paragraph 317 vi; paragraphs 109 and 210]

● the priority given by the University to the quality of the student experience, particularly [support for international students through induction courses], students with disabilities, students progressing from Foundation Degrees and students on placements [University of Northumbria at Newcastle, paragraph 254 v; paragraph 132]

● the University's determination to ensure that it has the postgraduate research students appropriate to its strengths through the management of recruitment, project approval and examination [Staffordshire University, paragraph 251 iv; paragraph 56]

- the University's equitable approach to, and support for, its part-time staff and students [including its First Week induction process] [University of East London, paragraph 256 v; paragraph 126]

- the University's student support mechanisms, especially with respect to its policies and strategies for cultural and religious diversity [and its well-organised induction arrangements] [University of Westminster, paragraph 241 i; paragraph 140]

- the student retention project, in particular, its multifaceted action lines and use of performance indicators [and key aspects of support for students including induction] [Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, paragraph 238 ii; paragraph 110]

- the organised and thoughtful approach, including that for the compilation of course material, to the assurance of the student learning experience from recruitment to qualification [Henley Management College, paragraph 213 v; paragraph 112]

- the information and support provided for pre-entry students [University of Manchester, paragraph 211 iii; paragraph 91]

- the role of [the External and Internal Student Administration division] in its administrative support of the student lifecycle [from first enquiry to graduation] [University of London External System, paragraph 145, third bullet; paragraph 94]

- the ways in which the College engenders a commitment among staff and students to its particular ethos, specifically through the thoroughness of its processes for staff appointment and student admissions, including arrangements for induction [Dartington College of Arts, paragraph 176 ii; paragraphs 78 and 91].

Recommendations

7   Recommendations relating specifically to recruitment and admissions were found in a number of institutional audit reports. In several cases, the recommendation was linked to wider concerns about the adequacy of institutional management information, and arose in considering institutions' approach to the collection and use of progression and completion data: one was concerned with the control of publicity materials utilised by partners in collaborative agreements. In addition, some recommendations mentioned recruitment and admissions in the context of concerns about the sufficiency of learning resources to sustain planned expansion.

The Academic Infrastructure

8   *Section 10* of QAA's *Code of practice* is concerned with recruitment and admissions. It was first published in September 2001 and this was the version used as a point of reference by institutions and audit teams between 2004 and 2006. A revised version of *Section 10* was published by QAA in 2006. A small number of audit reports contained explicit references to this section of the *Code of practice*. The references were general in nature, indicating that institutional policies had been developed or were being developed to take account of its precepts. One report noted

that the recruitment and admission of part-time and postgraduate students was being reviewed in order to ensure adherence to the *Code of practice*. Another observed that the institution had commissioned work on admissions information in the light of this section of the *Code of practice*. References to particular precepts were uncommon, although one report observed that the institution believed that most practice met the intended effects of this section of the *Code of practice*, but 'some further action was needed on the requirement for a formal procedure for interviewing applicants and the need to publish the complaints procedure relating to applications'.

9   A number of audit reports included discussions relating implicitly to specific precepts of *Section 10* of the *Code of practice*. There were, for example, comments on the relevance and accuracy of promotional materials (Precept 2), on the implementation of clear and fair selection policies (Precept 3), and on the ways in which institutions ensured that policies and procedures relating to admissions supported strategic objectives (Precept 7). However, in the case of some precepts, for example, those concerned with staff development and training (Precept 8), and with complaints (Precept 9), the audit reports contained insufficient information to be sure that institutions had taken them into account. Just one report mentioned training courses for those involved in the admissions process. This report noted that such training, together with a forum for sharing information and good practice, had been provided in order to assist admissions tutors in administering the details of a new approach to admissions resulting from the institution's support for widening participation.

10   References to other aspects of the Academic Infrastructure in the context of recruitment and admissions were sparse, although there were audit reports which noted that programme specifications provided information about the selection criteria used for accepting applicants. Where programme specifications did not provide that information, it was indicated that its inclusion would be helpful.

Themes

11   The themes emerging from references to recruitment and admissions in the institutional audit reports from 2004-05 and 2005-06 were:

- the development and monitoring of recruitment and admissions policy
- the use of recruitment and admissions data
- the provision of information to applicants
- the induction of newly admitted students
- the constraints on recruitment
- the admission of research students.

These themes are discussed further below.

Policies for recruitment and admissions

12   Several institutions had developed, or were developing, new admissions policies. These policies typically reflected institutional commitments to access, widening participation and increased diversity, as expressed in mission statements.

One such statement, for example, spoke of participation in higher education as a 'democratic entitlement'. Another declared that the institution's programmes and services 'should be available to all who can benefit from them, irrespective of social, economic, cultural, and ethnic differences. A number of other mission statements quoted or referred to in these audit reports included similar commitments especially when successful recruitment was stated to be an institutional priority.

13   Institutional frameworks for quality and standards sometimes included committees with specific responsibility for monitoring recruitment and admissions strategies, including the relation of admissions standards to widening participation. Such committees would be involved in the strategic review of an institution's course portfolio and might recommend phasing out subject areas where weak recruitment affected the viability of programmes. Successful recruitment was identified as a priority in some reports, and effective oversight of the strategies used to achieve it was regarded as an institutional responsibility. For example, one institution had developed means to oversee how departments and schools were using admissions criteria, and whether they were abiding by them.

14   In another institution its committee overseeing recruitment and admissions had been given responsibility for admissions regulations and procedures as well as policy and had called for 'vigilance in the management of entry standards'. The evidence made available for the audit process did not indicate that the institution had reviewed its admissions requirements, however, particularly for direct entry, even though there were low rates of progression and retention in some areas. In this case the audit report commented favourably on the conclusion of an internal advisory group that the institution's management of admissions policies and procedures would benefit from greater attention to the analysis of progression and retention in the light of entry qualifications.

15   Several audit reports noted the involvement of students in recruitment processes and in one instance there was evidence that the institution sought students' views on admission and registration. In another, the institution's widening participation strategy made use of a large number of student volunteers.

16   One audit report noted that the institution's admissions policy, in support of its approach to widening participation, emphasised 'capacity to benefit' from study as prominently as formal qualifications, and that the policy was being monitored by making use of retention statistics. Another report noted that the institution's admissions policy had led to marked variation in the entry qualifications presented by students and a wide international recruitment profile. This report observed that the minimum requirement for entry into degree-level programmes at the institution 'was lower than would normally be expected in UK degree-level education', and concluded from the evidence provided that the institution's admissions policy 'was a significant contributory factor to the low level of academic achievement within certain programme areas'. The report recommended that if the admissions policy were to be continued, 'then in order to safeguard academic standards…a more extensive and comprehensive level of resource for learning support would be required than was at present available'.

17   Actions taken by institutions to raise the aspirations of potential applicants and to encourage progression to higher education were mentioned in some audit reports. For example, one report noted that the institution had 'introduced specific initiatives to encourage progression from state schools and colleges in the region'. One of these initiatives provided a programme with a range of aspiration-raising activities enabling participants to demonstrate potential for success in higher education, and enabled students admitted to the institution from this programme to benefit from continuing support during their first year of study. On the basis of the evidence provided, the report judged that this programme had prepared students effectively for entry into higher education. This report also noted, in the context of a discipline audit trail, that admissions criteria were continuously monitored in order to ensure that non-traditional students were not disadvantaged.

18   Another audit report identified as a feature of good practice a scheme enabling the institution to admit students to study for medical degrees who had completed to the required standard a foundation year programme in a partner institution. This was part of the institution's strategy for widening participation that focused on raising the aspirations of students from the lower socio-economic groups and communities. To encourage state school pupils to fulfil their potential, the strategy also involved a student recruitment team visiting schools and colleges, speaking to sixth form students about higher education, and providing them with practical advice. The institution also distributed to schools computer-aided learning packages, and supported a tutoring scheme in which its students help with teaching in local schools. The report for this institution drew attention to a successful project that had enabled the institution to employ postdoctoral research assistants to spend part of their time in partner secondary schools providing teaching and assistance with the delivery of the science curriculum to pupils. These various activities were regarded as a feature of good practice [Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, paragraphs 149 and 151].

19   The widening participation strategy of a further institution, with a diverse student population, also aimed to raise the aspirations of potential applicants and incorporated a number of specific projects including facilitating access to medical and health care education, and the provision of additional study in a local comprehensive school for those students who lacked the required scientific knowledge and skills.

20   In one case an audit report questioned whether the scope of an admissions policy was sufficient. In this instance the institution's policy for admissions did not require its direct involvement in the admissions decisions of collaborating partners preparing students for the institution's qualifications, although it was made aware of the admissions criteria they used. The relevant audit report questioned whether this approach provided the institution with 'sufficient control' over the admission of students to programmes leading to the institution's awards.

21   Two audit reports identified features of good practice referring to the complete student lifecycle in terms of, respectively, administrative support, including admission and registration, and the organised and thoughtful approach to assurance of the student learning experience from recruitment onwards [University of London External System, paragraph 94; Henley Management College, paragraph 112].

22   Careful monitoring of admissions against the institution's expectations were noted in a number of audit reports. Several reports noted procedures for handling the withdrawal of programmes which were not recruiting students as successfully as the institution wished whilst at the same time safeguarding the interests of the students who had been recruited. One audit report made reference to such plans and to the institution's requirement that the plans must be approved and monitored and evidence that this process had enabled the institution to adapt the contents of its portfolio of provision whilst safeguarding the interests of students [University of Gloucestershire, paragraph 78]. Without such plans, as was indicated in another report, there could be difficulties for current students who might discover, perhaps at short notice, that study options had been withdrawn.

Use of recruitment and admissions data

23   How institutions use data and statistics to monitor their provision, and particularly students' progression through their studies and completion of their programmes, is the focus of another *Outcomes...* paper. The importance of management information systems and data in monitoring recruitment and admissions is such, however, that some discussion of these matters is required in this paper.

24   Almost half of the 59 institutional audit reports indicated that admissions data were frequently used by staff at a local level in annual monitoring processes. In some cases, staff were expected to provide a commentary on the data, and there was an expectation that trends would be analysed. Action plans deriving from consideration of admissions data were also mentioned in several reports.

25   Where data systems were able to provide helpful, timely and reliable information at a local level, they were used to support admissions processes, as indicated in an audit report which drew attention to the way in which an institution's system enabled all aspects of a student's progress to be tracked [University of Huddersfield, paragraphs 109, 223, and 238]. Another report found evidence that timely consideration was given to data on admissions, and referred to a clear example of attention to such data in a discipline audit trail where changes in programme delivery were being discussed to meet changes in the intake profile. The same report noted that, at a departmental level, the reception of reports on recruitment had resulted in recommendations concerning marketing and studentships.

26   In other reports, however, the scope of the data used appeared more limited. For example, it might not always include information about qualifications on entry. There was also much variation within and between institutions in the extent to which the data were considered, and in some cases there was little or no evidence of the data being analysed and used as a basis for decision making.

27   In one audit report it was noted that the institution was concerned about significant variability in the way data were used. The institution's view was supported by evidence provided in discipline audit trails which showed that in some cases there was full discussion of the data, whilst in other cases figures were given with only limited discussion and with no indication of action to be taken. The institution had introduced a staff development programme in order to improve interpretative skills

on the part of staff. Another institution, having introduced a comprehensive data system which included information about gender, age, ethnicity and disability of student admissions, was developing a code of practice indicating the kind of analysis of the data it expected.

28   Some reports noted evidence of significant limitations in the data available, or noted that departmental staff thought there were weaknesses in the timeliness, scope or accuracy of institutional data, including data concerning recruitment and admissions. Where this was the case, locally produced data were sometimes used to supplement those provided centrally, a measure which, whatever its immediate local benefits, was sometimes masking the inadequacies of centrally-provided data. In other cases, steps were being taken to improve the quality of the data so that they could be better used at local as well as institutional levels to inform decision making. In one of these cases, the audit report noted that although some improvements had taken place, the institutional data system had the potential to provide a wider range of data than was currently used. The institution was recommended to continue with its development of the system and to find further ways of ensuring the accuracy and consistency of the data.

29   The dependence of an effective and responsive admissions policy on accurate and timely data concerning the progression of students was acknowledged in several audit reports and there was evidence of recent, or planned, improvements in the scope and reliability of management information relating to recruitment and admissions. One institution had developed a comprehensive management information system that was being used extensively and effectively in many areas of the institution's work, including recruitment and admissions. The report for this institution identified this development as a feature of good practice [University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 79].

30   Other institutions anticipated that the improved availability of centrally-held data would assist monitoring of admissions practices at the local level. Thus, one audit report noted that, although steps had been taken to improve the quantity and quality of data concerning recruitment, admissions and widening participation, the institution had acknowledged that additional improvements were needed in the level and scope of the data to underpin the processes used. This view was endorsed by the report.

31   Similar concerns about the effective use of admissions data were noted in other audit reports. For example, a report for an institution which had identified a need for 'analyses of retention or success…related to entry qualifications', recommended that the institution give a higher priority to using its database (which was acknowledged to be effective) to provide such analyses and thereby help manage its admissions policy and procedures. Another report found little evidence of data being used on a routine basis at an institutional level to support quality management in general or admissions policy in particular. A further report, for an institution in which there was local responsibility for the collection and interpretation of data concerning admissions, indicated that difficulties could arise in using the data to inform strategic thinking and policy making at the institutional level.

32   Several other audit reports also found that although relevant data might be used at a local level, evidence of that data being used at institutional level to support admissions policy was sparse, and one institution was prompted to develop more formal procedures for using and evaluating management information. In one of these reports it was said to be unclear to the audit team how the data were used to enable institution-wide comparisons, and in another report the institution was recommended to make more effective use of internal data relating to entry qualifications to monitor academic standards. Where, as indicated in a further report, admissions data did not appear to be analysed in terms of key features such as variations and trends in entrance qualifications and differing socio-economic backgrounds, the institution was recommended to make use of that data at a corporate level, in order to help monitor academic standards more effectively.

33   The relevance of admissions data to the maintenance of academic standards was considered in another audit report, which noted that some external examiners had expressed concerns about entry standards for the programmes with which they were associated. In this case, the report suggested that the departments concerned might be asked to analyse entry qualifications and final performance to see whether a correlation existed, and whether changes to admissions policy or programme delivery were needed.

34   For some institutions there was a need to support an admissions policy with a strategy for retaining students who might otherwise leave before the completion of their studies. Data concerning student retention have a role in ensuring that such a strategy is effective, and in one institution it was noted that the availability of those data had proved useful in targeting students most likely to abandon their studies and in monitoring the effectiveness of the steps that had been taken to support them. The report identified the development and implementation of the institution's retention strategy, with the full engagement and support of staff and students, as a feature of good practice [University of Derby, paragraph 123].

35   Another institution had undertaken a review of its data systems, the results of which had led to informed discussions relevant to the use and further development of recruitment and retention strategies. The data system was capable of tracking the progress of cohorts of students as well as individuals and had proved useful in addressing concerns about retention in particular areas. The relevant audit report noted that the institution's reporting tools also enabled it to monitor applications prior to enrolment and to scrutinise student numbers throughout the recruitment phase.

36   Similar observations concerning the use of data to help in identifying and responding to difficulties in retaining students were found in several other reports. One such report recommended that the institution build on current initiatives by making 'the fullest use of its student data, particularly those relating to student progression and retention, and to reflect these in its ongoing management of student admissions policies'.

Information for applicants

37   The template QAA provided for the institutional audit reports prompted audit teams to look into the experiences of current students with using the information the institution provided about itself and its provision, including prospectuses and other pre-entry information. In this connection most of the reports contained information about the usefulness of promotional materials available to prospective students, whether they be provided in printed prospectuses or in electronic form on websites. Typically, information about programmes of study was produced at a local level and its relevance, accuracy and clarity were assured centrally.

38   Admissions policies might explicitly refer to the need for good quality promotional materials, as was the case in one institution whose policy sought to ensure that 'promotional materials are relevant, accurate at the time of publication…and provide information that will enable applicants to make informed decisions about their options'. Another institution aimed to 'advise, guide and select appropriate applicants in an efficient manner and with due care of the individual' and to ensure that its promotional material was accurate and reflected the quality and standards for which the institution aimed.

39   In most cases, there was evidence that students found the information received before admission generally helpful. One audit report, for example, stated that students were 'satisfied with the accuracy and completeness of the information… provided prior to admission'. According to another report there was comprehensive information for applicants, and guidance on admissions procedures for those holding offers. A further report observed that the institution provided 'an integrated and convenient service to students on all matters relating to access, admissions, finance, welfare support, student financial support and student accommodation'.

40   The scope of the information available could be wide and detailed, as indicated in an audit report which found that the institution's prospectus and its website included clearly specified admissions criteria. Another report noted that course handbooks, which included programme specifications, were available from the institution's admissions office on request.

41   Websites were commonly referred to as sources of information for prospective students. One institution had developed a website as a marketing tool 'to present a credible yet authoritative source of information on [the]...student experience'. The content made use of both corporate information and student comment gathered from interviews. The tone of the website was described as one of 'up-beat honesty', a view endorsed by the relevant audit report.

42   Additional advice for prospective students was mentioned in an audit report which noted that such students attend selection days so that they can 'gain sufficient understanding of the College's approach to learning and teaching' to enable them to assess whether to accept an offer of a place. In this case, the report identified as a feature of good practice the ways in which the institution engendered a commitment by its staff and students to its particular ethos through the thoroughness of its processes for admission [Dartington College of Arts, paragraph 91]. Another report noted that the information provided to applicants was intended to ensure 'a good match between the abilities and interests of students and the subjects,

learning opportunities and ethos of the [institution]'. In another institution, evidence provided by its students supported the view that 'published information paints a balanced and fair picture of the [institution], its programmes and modes of delivery, from which prospective students can form a judgement as to its suitability for their needs'.

43   There was evidence that prospective students had found visits by academic staff to secondary schools helpful in making choices. In one institution, a successfully developing arrangement, whereby postdoctoral research assistants were employed to spend part of their time teaching in partner schools, was identified as a feature of good practice [Imperial College of Science Technology and Medicine, paragraph 149]. The report for another institution referred to work with secondary schools aimed at encouraging pupils to consider entering higher education who might not otherwise do so.

44   There were, however, a few reports which found evidence of inaccurate or incomplete information being provided to prospective students. One audit report, for example, noted that the institution's information about progression and completion might not be entirely suitable in helping prospective students form a realistic view of the likelihood that they would complete their studies successfully. The institution was recommended to consider the matter further, 'in the interests of providing potential students with full and fair information which will enable them to make informed choices'. Another report judged that the institution's claims about the opportunities for full-time study at partner universities 'could be deemed to be misleading'. A further report noted the comments of students that information provided in the institution's prospectus did not, in some respects, provide an accurate impression of students' experience. In a further case, the need for an institution to formulate a means of ensuring that all information produced by collaborative partners for publicity purposes be approved by the institution was recommended. In another case, an institution which had become aware of concerns about the accuracy of information provided about the module choice available to students had taken steps to ensure that prospective students were made aware of limitation on choice and 'to mitigate the impact of falling numbers on available modules, particularly for part-time students'.

45   Further examples of incomplete information were provided in several audit reports which found that promotional material did not always make it clear that for some programmes of study there were additional costs to students arising from field trips and levies for materials. One of these reports concluded that the institution should 'ensure that prospective students are fully informed in advance about all costs additional to the standard fee arising from their chosen programme of study'.

46   Some audit reports cited concerns expressed in student written submissions regarding aspects of the information provided in prospectuses and on websites. For example, one report cited the submission's view that international students experienced a 'distinct lack of information to prepare them for the cultural differences they were likely to experience'. This submission also reported that some postgraduate students had found the information provided prior to arrival was 'lacking in content accuracy, relevance and quantity'. The institution concerned was, according to the report, responding constructively to these concerns. Another student written

submission, as cited in a report, drew attention to dissatisfaction on the part of some students with the way that changes in what had been advertised as available had been communicated to them.

47   Significant concerns about the reliability of promotional material were mentioned in one audit report where evidence indicated that the information provided to prospective students had misled them by raising expectations which were not met. On their admission, students at this institution had been presented with further information indicating that the promotional material that had encouraged them to apply had been inaccurate. In this case, the audit report recommended that the institution should 'ensure that all…promotional, marketing and advisory material relating to the awards available to students on completion of study…are accurate, complete, unambiguous and do not mislead'. Overall, however, it should be noted that most of the audit reports found that students were satisfied with the nature and accuracy of the information provided for them before their entry to the institution.

Induction of newly registered students

48   This short section deals only with the explanation to successful candidates of their arrangements for enrolment, registration, induction and orientation, and draws on Precept 6 of *Section 10* of the *Code of practice*. The associated guidance refers to the structure and timing of induction for all full-time, part-time and work-based students and the diverse needs of a student group which might include students with disabilities, those whose first language is not English, and mature students. The discussion of more general aspects of induction is covered in the *Outcomes...* paper on *Academic guidance, support and supervision, and personal guidance*.

49   Good practice was found at one institution where the students reported that pre-entry events and information was 'informative and comprehensive'. International students were particularly appreciative of being linked to a student mentor before entry to help them prepare for their move to the institution [University of Manchester, paragraph 91]. Recognition of the special induction requirements of particular groups of students was noted in the information and support provided by three other institutions [University of Northumbria at Newcastle, paragraph 132; University of East London, paragraph 126; and University of Westminster, paragraph 140]. Two institutions had used progression statistics to inform the planning of their induction programmes [Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, paragraph 110; University of Derby, paragraph 123]. The induction programme provided for entrants to one institution was also praised [Dartington College of Arts, paragraph 91].

50   There were relatively few recommendations in the audit reports which referred directly to induction. In one case, linked to arrangements for joint honours students, an institution had omitted to supply induction materials to them, or to invite them to briefing events, nor had the joint honours students been routinely entered onto module lists to assign them to module groups. In another case, an audit report commented critically on the adequacy of pre-registration materials, which had not made it plain that additional costs applied to certain programmes of study and courses. Other recommendations clustered around the need for institutions to ensure that students undertaking new projects (or roles) were properly prepared for them

through training, for example, in laboratory and health and safety procedures or, for postgraduate students, carrying out teaching duties.

Constraints on recruitment

51   A few audit reports referred to constraints on the recruitment of overseas and postgraduate students arising from the need to provide them with the learning resources they need to support their learning. Thus, one report noted that the institution's plans to expand by recruiting overseas undergraduates and overseas and home postgraduates placed pressure on learning and teaching space, particularly in larger departments. The institution had recognised that there was a shortage of academic space and the audit team was told that there were plans for the better management of current space. This report also noted, in the context of a discipline audit trail, that expansion in student numbers would put pressure on space for research project supervision, and that there were constraints on the recruitment of taught postgraduate students. The report concluded that the institution should consider enhancing its management of teaching and learning space in the context of its expansion strategy.

52   Other audit reports also considered institutional plans for growth in student numbers. In one case, while the relevant plan incorporated a small increase in academic space, it was also predicated on the more efficient use of current space to accommodate increased numbers of students. However, the necessary efficiencies depended on the achievement of other aspects of the plan, including recruitment in certain subject areas rather than others. The evidence made available for the audit process suggested that there were significant risks associated with the plan's targets, and the report recommended that the institution give further consideration to 'the levels of risk in all factors of growth and to continue to monitor and develop its learning resources, particularly the availability of space to match the growth in numbers'. In its response to the report, the institution expressed its confidence in its ability to manage the challenges facing its plan for growth.

Admission of research students

53   Arrangements for admitting research students are mentioned in some audit reports. One report, for example, noted that the institution had reviewed the consistency of its admissions processes for research students in the light of the section of the *Code of practice* concerned with postgraduate research programmes (*Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*). This report noted that research students received information prior to registration which they judged to be useful and accurate. Another report found evidence of pre-admission scrutiny of the supervisory support available for each research degree application, and judged that the institution's determination to ensure that its management of recruitment of research degree students was appropriate to its strengths and constituted a feature of good practice [Staffordshire University, paragraph 56].

54 Timely consideration of admissions data for research students was mentioned in one report, in the context of an institutional review of completion rates for doctoral students which had led to some amendments in practice.

Conclusions

55 The 59 institutional audit reports published between 2004 and 2006 provide information which shows that institutions' arrangements for attracting, recruiting and admitting students are generally effective. National policies aimed at increasing the proportion of school leavers who enter higher education have clearly encouraged institutions to take positive steps to widen participation and to increase the diversity of those studying in universities and colleges. Many institutions have developed policies which have helped them take those steps. Increasingly, they have suitable ways of using data to monitor the effects of their policies and make any changes needed to secure policy aims, although some institutions were recommended to make fuller use of their available data.

56 With very few exceptions, information for prospective students was well managed and provided them with the information they needed in order to make choices about what, and where, to study. There are some respects in which this information was sometimes less complete than it might be, but the evidence provided by students indicated that satisfaction levels were generally high. There is competition between institutions for students and it is therefore significant that these reports were able to draw attention to much evidence showing that the information they used to market themselves was fair, accurate and complete.

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

Harper Adams University College

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

American InterContinental University - London

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

2005-06

University of Manchester

Courtauld Institute of Art

Heythrop College

University of London External System

London School of Economics and Political Science

University of Bolton

Thames Valley University

University of Central England in Birmingham[5]

University of Worcester

Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies

Dartington College of Arts[6]

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth

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[5]   Now Birmingham City University
[6]   Now part of 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

Title

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

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 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 *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.