



Outcomes from Institutional audit: 2007-09

External involvement in quality management

Third series

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Preface

One of the objectives of Institutional audit is to 'contribute, in conjunction with other mechanisms and agencies in higher education, to the promotion and enhancement of quality in teaching, learning and assessment'. To support this objective, QAA publishes short working papers, each focused on a key topic addressed within the audit process.

These papers, which are published under the general title *Outcomes from Institutional audit*, are based on analysis of the individual audit reports (for full details of the methodology used, see Appendix C).

Two series of papers, covering audits which took place between 2003 and 2006, have already appeared, together with two related series, *Outcomes from Collaborative provision audit* and *Outcomes from Institutional review in Wales*. The present series will cover the cycle of audits taking place between 2007 and 2011.¹ Some structural changes have been made to the papers for this series: in particular, rather than considering the audit process in isolation, they will place the findings from audit in the context of policy developments and other evidence, for example from the National Student Survey, and key research findings where appropriate.

The papers seek to identify the main themes relating to the topic in question to be found in the audit reports, drawing in particular on the features of good practice and recommendations identified by audit teams. Both features of good practice and recommendations discussed in the paper are cross-referenced to paragraphs in the technical annex of individual audit reports, so that interested readers may follow them up in more detail. A full list of features of good practice and recommendations relating to each topic is given in Appendices A and B.

It should be remembered that a feature of good practice is a process or practice that the audit team considers to make a particularly positive contribution to the institution's approach to the management of the security of academic standards and/or the quality of provision **in the context of the institution**. Thus the features of good practice mentioned in this paper should be considered in their proper institutional context, and each is perhaps best viewed as a stimulus to reflection and further development rather than as a model for emulation. Similarly, recommendations are made where audit teams identify specific matters where the institution should consider taking action; they rarely indicate major deficiencies in existing practice. *Outcomes* papers seek to highlight themes which emerge when recommendations across a number of Institutional audit reports are considered as a whole.

Outcomes papers are written primarily for policy makers and managers within the higher education community with immediate responsibility for, and interest in, quality assurance, although specific topics may be of interest to other groups of readers. While QAA retains copyright in the content of the *Outcomes* papers, they may be freely downloaded from QAA's website and cited with acknowledgement.

¹ For further information about Institutional audit, see www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/Pages/Institutional-audit.aspx.

Summary

In managing the standards of the awards they make and the quality of the learning opportunities they offer, higher education institutions are expected to make strong and scrupulous use of independent external examiners in summative assessment of students (on both taught and postgraduate research programmes) and of independent external assessors in quality management procedures, including approval and review of degree programmes. Reports of the 76 Institutional audits conducted between September 2006 and July 2009 show that the great majority of institutions used these forms of externality sufficiently well to give audit teams confidence in the institutions' arrangements overall. There were five institutions where audit teams had limited confidence in part of the arrangements.

Reports stress that external assessors should be independent of the institution with no prior involvement with the programme (and hence should not be current or recent external examiners with connections to the unit concerned), and should have sufficient knowledge of UK higher education. Institutions sometimes strengthen programme design and approval by involving other external stakeholders, such as employers, on approval panels or on programme advisory boards. Most institutions aim to make the arrangements for collaborative programmes as close as possible to those for in-house programmes.

To calibrate the standards of their awards and the quality of their learning opportunities, institutions are also expected to make use of external reference points. These include the guidance published by QAA under the general title of the Academic Infrastructure; European guidelines; practice elsewhere in UK higher education; and the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) that accredit degree programmes. Audit reports confirm that, on the whole, all aspects of the Academic Infrastructure are now well embedded into institutional processes and are generally working as intended. About half of all institutions are reported to be actively engaged with relevant European guidelines, and other institutions are aware of the guidelines, though reports for some institutions are silent on this issue. Some institutions bring in additional external experts to help in their deliberations or benchmark their practice against other institutions. The audit reports also confirm there is systematic engagement between institutions and PSRBs.

Like external assessors, external examiners should be sufficiently independent and knowledgeable; most institutions offer them induction and provide guidance on their role. For collaborative provision the arrangements are typically modelled on those for in-house programmes, and where programmes are offered both at a partner and in-house, the same external examiner normally oversees both. Where the candidate for a postgraduate research degree is a member of staff of the institution, a few institutions require two external examiners to ensure sufficient independence and externality. At the time of these audits there was a new expectation that institutions should share external examiners' reports with students or their representatives, and, while many reports confirmed that this was being done, others recommended that procedures for doing so should be implemented more effectively or enhanced.

All reports confirm that institutions have sound procedures for incorporating externality into their management of the standards of their awards and the quality of their learning opportunities, apart from the handful of partial exceptions already noted. Evidence from this series of audits suggests that institutions now use overview reports derived from different forms of external involvement in quality management more systematically than in the past; although they could still learn from them more effectively. Overall, since the second series of *Outcomes from institutional audit* reports, the concept of external involvement in quality management has become better understood and more effectively embedded into institutions'

own processes, with consequent benefits for setting and maintaining the standards of awards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities.

Context

1 This paper is based on a review of the outcomes of the 76 Institutional audit reports published between September 2006 and July 2009 (a full list of the reports can be found at Appendix D on page 32). The methodology used in analysing the reports for this and other *Outcomes from Institutional audit* series is described in Appendix C, page 31. Some of these institutions were subject to a separate collaborative provision audit, but otherwise collaborative provision is included within these reports.²

2 Institutions are responsible for the standards of their awards and for the quality of the opportunities they provide for their students to learn what they need to gain those awards. However, institutions rely on the expertise of their academic staff in any given subject to design and run programmes. Hence, in order to be assured that programmes in each subject accord with the expectations of the wider subject community, institutions draw upon independent external expertise. When taught programmes are approved or reviewed, **external assessors** help to assure institutions that the curricula are up to date, properly structured and suitably resourced in relation to those of their subject across the sector. Similarly, when students on taught programmes are assessed, **external examiners** help to assure institutions that the standards of awards align with national minimum threshold standards and, more widely, with those of their subject across the sector, and that assessment is conducted properly. For research degrees, external examiners are appointed to examine individual candidates and their theses; external assessors are used only to advise on the taught component of professional doctorates.

3 External involvement in quality management and the use of external reference points are an essential focus for audit. The *Handbook for Institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland* (QAA 2006) says:

There are two areas where audit teams will find it particularly difficult to express confidence if certain elements are found to be missing. The first of these is a strong and scrupulous use of independent external examiners in summative assessment. The second is a similar use of independent external participants in internal quality management procedures....In both cases, the emphasis is on both independence and externality being satisfied.³

Guidance on these matters is provided in the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, Section 4: *External examining*⁴ and Section 7: *Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*,⁵ which institutions are expected to take into account.

4 The expectations in the preceding paragraph focus on taught degree programmes. The audit method for the present set of reports also required audit teams to report upon the extent to which institutional arrangements for securing the academic standards of awards and the quality of provision in postgraduate research degree programmes were in alignment with the *Code of practice*, Section 1: *Postgraduate research programmes*, which includes the

² University of Bradford, University of Essex, Coventry University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Middlesex University, Nottingham Trent University, Open University, University of Central Lancashire, University of Greenwich, University of Hull, University of Kent, University of Portsmouth, University of Sunderland.

³ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Handbook-for-Institutional-audit-2006.aspx

⁴ The *Code of practice*, Section 4: second edition, QAA August 2004; www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Code-of-practice-Section-4.aspx.

⁵ The *Code of practice*, Section 7: second edition, QAA September 2006; www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Code-of-practice-Section-6.aspx.

use made of external examiners.⁶ For each institution the audit team had access to the report of a special review of research degree programmes commissioned by the funding bodies of England, Wales and Northern Ireland and carried out in 2005-06. An overall report of the review in England and Northern Ireland, published in January 2007, revealed no special concerns about the use of external examiners in research degree assessment.⁷ The rest of the present report refers only to taught programmes unless otherwise stated.

5 Institutional audit also reports on how institutions monitor and use other external sources of guidance. The *Framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) gives generic qualification descriptors against which institutions can calibrate their awards.⁸ Audit teams enquire how institutions ensure that the standards and levels of their awards align with those in the FHEQ. Subject benchmark statements provide a reference point for assuring the standards of degrees in specific subject areas. Developed with the relevant subject community, they describe what gives a subject its coherence and identity, and define what abilities and skills graduates need to master the subject, but do not prescribe the syllabus. Audits explore how institutions engage with subject benchmarks in their processes of programme approval and review. Starting in 2007, during the period to which the present set of audit reports relates, QAA published revised versions of many subject benchmark statements. Audits also address how effectively institutions engage with external reference points as they are updated and revised.

6 Many programmes are subject to external scrutiny by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). These bodies determine whether individual curricula provide a suitable preparation for graduates to practise or be recognised in a profession (often after further experience). Accreditation by PSRBs can therefore provide institutions with an additional measure of the relevance of their curricula and the standards of achievement required for their awards. Staff from industry, commerce and professional practice may serve as external assessors and external examiners, particularly for programmes with a practical orientation. Institutions may also use the expertise of such staff systematically as members of subject or programme advisory boards to strengthen the curriculum. All of these features may be explored in Institutional audit.

7 A review of the national Quality Assurance Framework was published in October 2006, during the period to which the present set of audit reports relates. This expressed the expectation that higher education institutions should 'share external examiners' reports as a matter of course with the institution's student representatives, for example through staff-student committees', and stipulated that QAA should provide assurance through Institutional audit that this expectation was being met.⁹ From the academic year 2007-08, audit reports addressed how higher education institutions were sharing external examiners' reports with students and their representatives.

8 Amid public concerns about standards and quality in higher education, the then Chief Executive of QAA gave evidence to the parliamentary Select Committee on Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills in July 2008. The Committee launched an enquiry, Students

⁶ The *Code of practice, Section 1*: second edition, QAA September 2004;

www.gaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Code-of-practice-section-1.aspx.

⁷ www.gaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Report-on-the-review-of-research-degree-programmes-England-and-Northern-Ireland.aspx

⁸ FHEQ: QAA January 2001, revised August 2008;

www.gaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/The-framework-for-higher-education-qualifications-in-England-Wales-and-Northern-Ireland.aspx.

⁹ *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, Phase two outcomes*, HEFCE 2006/45; www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2006/06_45.

and Universities, in October 2008, the report of which, published in August 2009, included recommendations concerning the external examiner system.¹⁰ In parallel, QAA undertook enquiries on four themes, including external examining.¹¹ The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) also asked a subcommittee of its Teaching Quality and Student Experience committee to carry out its own investigation, advising HEFCE on its statutory obligations with respect to quality and standards in the English higher education sector; the report, HEFCE 2009/40, published in October 2009, included recommendations concerning the external examiner system.¹² All these reports focused attention on external examining during the period to which the present set of audit reports relates, but none resulted in specific changes to the external examining system during that period.

9 In audit reports, these various aspects of external involvement in quality management are mainly considered in the sections on institutional management of academic standards and of learning opportunities, and on arrangements for postgraduate research degree students, but they may occur in all other sections. Thus the use of external participants and of external guidance in quality management permeates audit reports.

Themes

10 A consideration of the features of good practice, the recommendations and other references to externality in the audit reports suggests that the following broad themes merit further discussion:

- External assessors in programme approval and review
- External points of reference
- Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies
- Appointment and use of external examiners
- Use of external examiners' reports.

External assessors in programme approval and review

11 Although external examining is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of external involvement, external participation in programme approval and review is key to assuring institutions that programmes are of an appropriate standard and quality. This theme covers whether external assessors are appointed, how independent they are, and how scrupulously they are used. Also included here are a few instances where institutions use boards of external members to advise on programme development and curriculum content.

Programme approval

12 Almost all audit reports confirm that proposals for new programmes must be approved by a panel that contains at least one independent external assessor who is a subject specialist, so that the expectations in the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* are generally fulfilled.¹³ The exceptions were one

¹⁰ www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmdius/170/17002.htm

¹¹ *Thematic enquiries into concerns about academic quality and standards in higher education in England*, QAA May 2009; www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/The-nature-of-doctorateness-Notes-from-a-discussion-meeting-hosted-by-QAA-and-the-University-of-Reading-Graduate-School---.aspx.

¹² www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09_40

¹³ Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 37; Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 28; Royal College of Music, paragraphs 30, 33; School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 49; School of Pharmacy, paragraph 68; University College Falmouth, paragraph 27; Anglia Ruskin University, paragraphs 31, 76; Bath Spa University, paragraphs 32, 59; Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraphs 67, 69; Institute of

institution where appointing an external assessor was not mandatory but often occurred,¹⁴ and four institutions that were recommended to review their procedures to ensure sufficient formal external academic scrutiny at programme approval.¹⁵ Two institutions were recommended to extend academic scrutiny to learning resources and to short courses.¹⁶ One audit report suggested that an institution should consider including its external assessors as members of a scrutinising panel which met the programme team.¹⁷ Another audit report noted that a higher committee had changed panel approvals without reference back to the external panel member and recommended that the institution should reconsider the role of the committee to ensure that all validation decisions were fully informed and had appropriate externality.¹⁸ On the other hand, another report indicated that the institution's scrupulous use of external assessors contributed to a feature of good practice.¹⁹

Independence of assessors

13 Sometimes reports express reservations about the independence of the assessors used and whether they act solely on behalf of the institution. The academic unit proposing a programme may choose or be required by the institution to seek external advice in developing its proposal,²⁰ and one audit report recommended that for enhancement and stronger quality assurance the institution should seek external academic input at that stage.²¹ However, giving advice aligns the external adviser with the academic unit and its proposal, and hence compromises the independence expected of an external assessor required to report to the institution on the soundness of the proposal. It is often convenient to seek advice from a current or recent external examiner who already understands the unit

Cancer Research, paragraph 28; Keele University, paragraph 30; Leeds College of Music, paragraphs 30, 80; London Business School, paragraph 33; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraph 47; Loughborough University, paragraphs 39, 81; Roehampton University, paragraphs 19, 20; Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 26; Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 26; University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 29; University of Bradford, paragraph 43; University of Brighton, paragraphs 40, 91; University of Buckingham, paragraph 29; University of Chichester, paragraphs 31, 33, 85; University of Essex, paragraphs 21, 22, 51; University of Exeter, paragraphs 26, 87; University of Lincoln, paragraphs 19, 45, 47; University of Reading, paragraph 33; University of Salford, paragraphs 26, 51; University of Southampton, paragraph 25; University of Sussex, paragraphs 54, 60; University of the Arts London, paragraphs 31-33, 61; University of York, paragraphs 38, 85; Aston University, paragraphs 29, 71; Bournemouth University, paragraph 18; City University London, paragraph 23; Coventry University, paragraphs 36, 74; De Montfort University, paragraphs 39, 68, 69; Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 47; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 22; Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 16; Liverpool Hope University, paragraphs 29, 75; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraphs 23, 64, 66; Middlesex University, paragraph 17; Nottingham Trent University, paragraphs 31, 65, 68; Open University, paragraphs 39, 42, 43, 82; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 39; Rose Bruford College, paragraphs 37, 91; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 30; Southampton Solent University, paragraphs 40, 133; University College London, paragraph 34; University of Bath, paragraph 24; University of Birmingham, paragraph 76; University of Bristol, paragraphs 22-24, 64; University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 27; University of Durham, paragraph 25; University of East Anglia, paragraph 23; University of Greenwich, paragraph 34; University of Hertfordshire, paragraphs 21, 52, 53; University of Hull, paragraphs 20, 53; University of Kent, paragraphs 26, 54; University of Leicester, paragraph 14; University of Liverpool, paragraph 24; University of Northampton, paragraphs 30, 32; University of Oxford, paragraphs 32, 88; University of Portsmouth, paragraphs 31, 94; University of Sunderland, paragraph 19; University of Surrey, paragraph 42; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraphs 31, 63; University of Warwick, paragraphs 25, 71, 75; University of Winchester, paragraph 25; Wolverhampton, paragraph 53

¹⁴ University of Cambridge, paragraph 73

¹⁵ Royal Academy of Music, paragraphs 26, 27; Lancaster University, paragraph 25; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 25; School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 19

¹⁶ University of Lincoln, paragraph 93; University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 23

¹⁷ Rose Bruford College, paragraph 41

¹⁸ Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 31

¹⁹ Open University, paragraph 47

²⁰ University of Essex, paragraph 21; Bournemouth University, paragraph 19; Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 31; University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 21; University of East Anglia, paragraph 56; University of Oxford, paragraph 32

²¹ Roehampton University, paragraph 52

and its existing programmes, but the advice-giving involved in such a role would unavoidably detract from providing independent advice to the institution.

14 Hence some reports note the stipulation by institutions that external assessors should not be current or recent external examiners or have other close connections with the institution.²² Conversely, one audit report noted that advice on programme development must not compromise the independence of external examiners.²³ Two audit reports recommended that institutions should establish criteria to ensure that external examiners or advisers were not appointed as external members of approval and review panels.²⁴ A few other reports recommended that institutions should develop criteria for the appointment of external assessors and advice on their role,²⁵ or, for similar reasons, should align programme approval arrangements more effectively with the *Code of practice, Section 7*.²⁶ One report noted that external assessors for a Foundation Degree approval were not independent because they came from the sponsoring employer for students on the programme.²⁷ There are different concepts of 'independence' here. Thus, external assessors involved in programme approval need to be independent not only of the institution but also of prior involvement with the unit concerned or the development of the programme. The same applies to external examiners, whose ability to act independently should not be compromised by prior contributions to programme design or development.

15 This issue is highlighted in the case of proposals for revisions to existing programmes. Although major revisions are typically approved only with a fully independent external assessor, minor revisions can usually be approved without such an assessor. Hence this matter depends on where the line is drawn between major and minor revision, which may be determined by credit volume,²⁸ by resource implications²⁹ or sometimes by a risk analysis. It is not the business of audit to express a preference between these methods, but a few reports comment that the method adopted should be carefully considered and clearly specified.³⁰ In practice, a few institutions do require minor changes to existing programmes to be accompanied by comments from external examiners who can draw on their experience of current programmes, especially in respect of assessment.³¹ Nevertheless, completely or substantially new programme proposals are considered in the light of independent external specialist advice.

²² Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 31; Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 26; University of Bradford, paragraph 46; University of Buckingham, paragraph 65; University of Exeter, paragraph 39; Coventry University, paragraph 36; University of Bath, paragraph 42; University of Bristol, paragraph 27; University of Durham, paragraph 25; University of Lincoln, paragraph 95; Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 32; University of East Anglia, paragraph 57; University of Leicester, paragraph 18; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 53

²³ City University London, paragraph 36

²⁴ Royal College of Music 36, paragraph; School of Pharmacy, paragraph 68

²⁵ School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 20; University of Chichester, paragraph 34; University of Lincoln, paragraphs 105, 108; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 54

²⁶ University of Buckingham, paragraphs 35, 66

²⁷ University of Aston, paragraph 132

²⁸ University of Southampton, paragraph 25; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 22; University of Warwick, paragraph 153

²⁹ Bath Spa University, paragraph 61

³⁰ Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 31; University of Greenwich, paragraph 41

³¹ Bath Spa University, paragraphs 42, 61; Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraph 70; Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 17; University of Essex, paragraph 51; University of Lincoln, paragraph 58; Rose Bruford College, paragraph 56; University College London, paragraph 112; University of Durham, paragraph 26

Advice from external stakeholders

16 Approval panels may contain assessors representing external stakeholders such as employers or PSRB representatives, usually in addition to external academic assessors.³² However, at a few institutions audit reports indicated that approval panels did not always contain sufficient external expertise from UK higher education, and recommended that the institutions should ensure suitable panel membership.³³

17 A few reports note that institutions have advisory boards for individual academic units, usually those with strong applied or professional links.³⁴ Such boards are typically expected to advise on curriculum and new programme development, thus helping to keep the unit's programmes relevant to current practice. However, one report recommended the institution to review how to make effective and consistent use of its advisory boards.³⁵ Three institutions had external members on school boards whose contribution to curriculum development and the enhancement of the student experience was found to be a feature of good practice,³⁶ while another had programme boards with external advisers whose 'exceptional contributions' were a factor in recognising its quality management procedures for collaborative provision as a feature of good practice.³⁷

Collaborative provision

18 Programme approval usually follows an earlier stage (or stages) of strategic planning approval in relation to the likely viability of a proposed programme and its fit with the overall portfolio. For collaborative provision, these two stages are typically preceded by approval of the partner institution in relation to its general suitability and its ability to provide the requisite learning resources. There may also be external input to such partner approval.³⁸ Otherwise, audit reports say little that is distinctive about external assessors in the approval of programmes delivered through collaboration with a partner institution.

19 Reports confirm the conclusions of the *Outcomes from Collaborative provision audit paper Approval and review of partnerships and programmes (QAA 2010)*³⁹ that in many institutions collaborative provision operates within the same framework as in-house provision, or under comparable arrangements.⁴⁰ One report noted that an external assessor

³² Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 31; Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 28; Loughborough University, paragraph 81; University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 29; University of Bradford, paragraph 45; University of Lincoln, paragraph 95; University of the Arts London, paragraph 41; Aston University, paragraph 29; Bournemouth University, paragraph 18; City University London, paragraph 27; De Montfort University, paragraphs 43, 69; University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 27; University of Liverpool, paragraph 24; University of Surrey, paragraph 42; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 31; University of Winchester, paragraph 25; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 53

³³ University of Bradford, paragraphs 48-50; Southampton Solent University, paragraphs 49, 51, 54; University of Bath, paragraphs 42-46; University of Sunderland, paragraphs 19, 21, 26

³⁴ Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 75; Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 61; Loughborough University, paragraph 42; University of Bradford, paragraph 108; University of Reading, paragraph 69; Aston University, paragraph 72; Bournemouth University, paragraph 93; Lancaster University, paragraph 38; University of Warwick, paragraph 71

³⁵ Aston University, paragraph 72

³⁶ Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 61; Bath Spa University, paragraph 58; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 66

³⁷ City University London, paragraphs 93, 95

³⁸ Aston University, paragraph 131; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 107

³⁹ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/QAA372CPAApproval.pdf

⁴⁰ Royal Agricultural College, paragraphs 19, 99; Royal College of Art, paragraph 193; Royal College of Music, paragraphs 163, 165; School of Pharmacy, paragraph 143; Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 152; Bath Spa University, paragraph 130; Keele University, paragraph 156; Roehampton University, paragraph 104; Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 105; University of Brighton, paragraph 163; University of Buckingham, paragraph 100; University of Chichester, paragraph 143; University of Exeter, paragraphs 176, 202;

was not required for a programme already approved at the institution to be delivered at an existing partner.⁴¹ At another institution, academic units are required to take external advice in respect of collaborative provision and provision that involves PSRBs, but are merely encouraged to do so for in-house provision.⁴² At a third institution, the appointment of an external adviser to support the development of collaborative provision was regarded as a feature of good practice.⁴³

Postgraduate research degree programmes

20 For postgraduate research degree programmes, the role of external assessors in advising on curriculum matters is relevant mostly to professional doctorates. One audit report refers to the use of three external assessors for a professional doctorate⁴⁴ and another to the use of an external assessor in a review of research degrees.⁴⁵

Programme review

21 Periodic review of programmes generally follows a procedure equivalent to that for initial approval, with external assessors, but with an evidence base that includes external examiners' reports.⁴⁶ One institution was introducing periodic review at the time of its audit.⁴⁷ In a few instances the process was regarded as particularly rigorous and developmental,⁴⁸ with one institution described as 'exceeding expectations' by appointing three external assessors when its procedures required only one,⁴⁹ and another operating a 'robust and effective' process of periodic review that the audit team considered to be a feature of good practice.⁵⁰ On the other hand, a couple of audit teams made recommendations to develop the process by ensuring sufficient academic externality⁵¹ or a more critical and robust contribution by external peers to periodic review.⁵² One institution was recommended to reflect on how to make the most of opportunities for enhancement arising from external involvement in programme approval, monitoring and review.⁵³

University of Lincoln, paragraph 164; University of Reading, paragraph 149; University of Salford, paragraph 98; University of Southampton, paragraph 110; University of the Arts London, paragraph 131; Aston University, paragraph 130; Bournemouth University, paragraph 85; De Montfort University, paragraph 181; Liverpool Hope University, paragraphs 164, 171; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 176; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 181; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 76; University College London, paragraph 183; University of Bath, paragraphs 151, 154; University of Bristol, paragraph 120; University of Leicester, paragraph 79; University of Liverpool, paragraph 130; University of Northampton, paragraph 78; University of Oxford, paragraph 178; University of Portsmouth, paragraph 28; University of Surrey, paragraph 190; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 114; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 129

⁴¹ De Montfort University, paragraph 180

⁴² University of Lancaster, paragraph 23

⁴³ University of Chichester, paragraph 142

⁴⁴ Royal College of Music, paragraph 187

⁴⁵ Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 139

⁴⁶ Bath Spa University, paragraphs 35, 36; Roehampton University, paragraph 21; City University London, paragraph 27; Coventry University, paragraph 45; Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 47; Lancaster University, paragraph 28; Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 171

⁴⁷ School of Pharmacy, paragraph 87

⁴⁸ University of Essex, paragraph 26; University of Exeter, paragraph 35; University of Salford, paragraph 27; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 34; Rose Bruford College, paragraph 53; University of Birmingham, paragraph 42; University of Leicester, paragraph 16

⁴⁹ Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 31

⁵⁰ Keele University, paragraph 42 (report 99)

⁵¹ University of Bath, paragraph 46

⁵² Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 35

⁵³ Loughborough University, paragraphs 52, 90

External points of reference

22 This theme covers how institutions engage with external points of reference. These include the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and the *Code of practice* (that is, collectively, the Academic Infrastructure), reference points developed as part of the Bologna Process to create a European higher education area, and some instances where institutions relate their performance to that of others within the higher education sector. The expectations of PSRBs are dealt with as a separate theme. For the present theme, the issue is not so much alignment with each part of the Academic Infrastructure, in particular the 10 individual sections of the *Code of practice*, which audit explores separately. Rather, it is how institutions ensure that their processes take due account of external points of reference, including changes over time.

23 Most audits report that institutions have policies and procedures that embody the Academic Infrastructure, occasionally not in every detail but sufficiently for audit reports to record confidence in their arrangements for securing standards and quality.⁵⁴ Some institutions were strongly recommended to develop more systematic and better embedded approaches to their engagement with external reference points, both generally and with reference to specific matters, including credit-bearing courses taken at partner institutions, taught postgraduate provision, levels of provision, and nomenclature of awards.⁵⁵ However, the structured engagement of two other institutions with the Academic Infrastructure was considered to be a feature of good practice.⁵⁶

24 Many reports note specifically how institutions update policies and procedures when external reference points change.⁵⁷ The ways in which two institutions responded

⁵⁴ Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 74; Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 54; Royal College of Music, paragraph 80; School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraphs 93, 94; University College Falmouth, paragraph 60; Anglia Ruskin University, paragraphs 48-51, 72, 73; Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraphs 27, 63-65; Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 57; Keele University, paragraph 80; Leeds College of Music, paragraphs 74-76; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraph 41; Loughborough University, paragraphs 75, 76; Roehampton University, paragraph 41; Royal Academy of Music, paragraphs 43-45, 51, 52; Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 53; University College for the Creative Arts, paragraphs 63, 64, 67; University of Bradford, paragraphs 51-53; University of Brighton, paragraph 86; University of Cambridge, paragraphs 66, 67; University of Chichester, paragraphs 60-62, 65; University of Essex, paragraphs 48, 49; University of Leeds, paragraph 63; University of Lincoln, paragraph 87; University of Reading, paragraph 67; University of Salford, paragraph 53; University of Southampton, paragraphs 31, 32, 50; University of Sussex, paragraphs 48-50; University of the Arts London, paragraph 59; Aston University, paragraph 63; Coventry University, paragraph 54; De Montfort University, paragraph 65; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 43-46, 55; Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 70; Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 59; Open University, paragraphs 58-64, 78, 79; Queen's University Belfast, paragraphs 54-59; Rose Bruford College, paragraph 84; Southampton Solent University, paragraphs 95, 96, 125; University College London, paragraphs 68-70, 110; University of Bath, paragraphs 65-71; University of Birmingham, paragraphs 68, 69; University of Bristol, paragraph 73; University of Central Lancashire, paragraphs 59-61; University of Durham, paragraphs 43-48, 64; University of East Anglia, paragraphs 19-22, 34, 35; University of Greenwich, paragraphs 51, 52; University of Hertfordshire, paragraphs 32-34; University of Hull, paragraphs 37-39, 51; University of Kent, paragraph 52; University of Liverpool, paragraphs 37, 38; University of Oxford, paragraphs 44-46; University of Surrey, paragraphs 66, 67; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraphs 48, 49; University of Warwick, paragraphs 64, 65; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 48

⁵⁵ Royal College of Art, paragraph 62; Royal College of Music, paragraph 52; School of Pharmacy, paragraphs 44, 45, 66, 69; London Business School, paragraphs 70, 110; University of Buckingham, paragraphs 48, 63; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 47; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraphs 60, 62; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 94; University of East Anglia, paragraph 22; University of Greenwich, paragraph 53; University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 35

⁵⁶ University of Chichester, paragraph 67; University of Northampton, paragraph 28

⁵⁷ Bath Spa University, paragraph 56; Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraph 41; Loughborough University, paragraph 76; Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 40; University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 65; University of Cambridge, paragraph 38; University of Chichester, paragraph 64; University of Leeds, paragraphs 65, 66; University of Lincoln, paragraph 88; University of Sheffield, paragraphs 52-56; University of the Arts London, paragraph 59; University of York, paragraph 81; Aston University,

systematically to external changes were identified as features of good practice,⁵⁸ but two others were recommended to improve their engagement with the changing Academic Infrastructure.⁵⁹

25 Over three quarters of audit reports note how the institution engages with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2005)⁶⁰ and related elements of the Bologna Process.⁶¹ Little or no engagement was reported at two institutions.⁶² A few institutions were aware of the issues but not fully engaged,⁶³ but about half of all institutions were reported to be actively engaged, sometimes primarily through using the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System or the diploma supplement.⁶⁴ A few more institutions relied on their alignment with the Academic Infrastructure and its equivalence to the ESG.⁶⁵

26 A few audit reports referred to institutions taking account of information and feedback from the broader sector.⁶⁶ One institution was recommended to benchmark better against the broader higher education sector,⁶⁷ and another to do so specifically in respect of its postgraduate research degree programmes.⁶⁸ A system of staff visits from one institution to other higher education institutions to benchmark practice was identified as a feature of

paragraph 42, 64; Coventry University, paragraph 55; Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 71; Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 59; Rose Bruford College, paragraph 85; University College London, paragraphs 66, 71, 73; University of East Anglia, paragraph 53; University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 49; University of Kent, paragraph 53; University of Sunderland, paragraph 47; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 48

⁵⁸ University of Sheffield, paragraph 56; University of Portsmouth, paragraph 80

⁵⁹ University of Leeds, paragraph 79; Nottingham Trent University, paragraphs 40, 45

⁶⁰ www.enqa.eu/files/ENQA%20Bergen%20Report.pdf

⁶¹ There was no mention in reports for the Royal College of Art, School of Pharmacy, University College Falmouth, Institute of Cancer Research, Keele University, London Business School, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Royal Academy of Music, Trinity Laban Conservatoire of music and Dance, University of Sheffield, University of Sussex, Aston University, City University London, Goldsmiths' College, Lancaster University, Leeds Trinity and All Saints, Liverpool Hope University, Rose Bruford College, University of Leicester, University of Northampton, University of Salford.

⁶² Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 54; Coventry University, paragraph 61

⁶³ Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 49; Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 34; School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 62; Bath Spa University, paragraph 46; Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraph 18; Loughborough University, paragraph 57; University of Chichester, paragraph 18; University of the Arts London, paragraph 50; University of Portsmouth, paragraph 41

⁶⁴ Royal College of Music, paragraph 84; Leeds College of Music, paragraph 52; Roehampton University, paragraph 9; University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 47; University of Bradford, paragraph 24; University of Brighton, paragraph 86; University of Cambridge, paragraph 40; University of Essex, paragraph 17; University of Exeter, paragraph 17; University of Leeds, paragraphs 26, 63; University of Lincoln, paragraph 42; University of Reading, paragraph 21; University of Southampton, paragraph 34; Bournemouth University, paragraph 33; De Montfort University, paragraph 51; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 44; Middlesex University, paragraph 32; Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 40; Open University, paragraph 62; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 59; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 47; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 35; University College London, paragraph 53; University of Bath, paragraph 23; University of Birmingham, paragraph 54; University of Bristol, paragraph 74; University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 19; University of Durham, paragraph 46; University of East Anglia, paragraph 14; University of Greenwich, paragraph 41; University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 97; University of Hull, paragraph 24; University of Liverpool, paragraph 38; University of Oxford, paragraph 46; University of Sunderland, paragraph 20; University of Warwick, paragraph 22; University of Winchester, paragraph 25

⁶⁵ University of York, paragraph 51; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 46; University of Birmingham, paragraph 54; University of Kent, paragraph 26; University of Surrey, paragraph 74; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 51; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 31

⁶⁶ University of Brighton, paragraph 89; University of Reading, paragraph 129; University of Southampton, paragraph 51; Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 41; Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 60; University of Bristol, paragraph 74; University of Durham, paragraph 65; University of Greenwich, paragraph 75

⁶⁷ Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraphs 100, 119

⁶⁸ University of Winchester, paragraph 113

good practice,⁶⁹ as was another institution's thorough benchmarking against a variety of national and international benchmarks at programme approval.⁷⁰ One institution's structured use of information about practice elsewhere in the sector to enhance its personal tutoring was also seen as a feature of good practice.⁷¹

Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

27 Accreditation of programmes by PSRBs can be regarded as a particular instance of benchmarking against external points of reference. The primary focus for accreditation is the academic unit offering a given programme: as one audit report clearly points out, some programmes must engage with the relevant PSRB, others may do so if they choose, and for some programmes there is no relevant PSRB.⁷² There may also be differences in how far PSRBs deal directly with the institution as an awarding body rather than through the relevant academic unit, though sometimes PSRBs conduct accreditation visits jointly with approval and review processes.⁷³ One report acknowledged possible tensions between institutions and PSRBs, concluding that the institution effectively balanced its own overriding responsibility for the standards of its awards against maintaining professional accreditation.⁷⁴

28 PSRB accreditation gives institutions additional reassurance about the standards of their awards and the employability of their graduates, which may help recruitment, while the process of accreditation can also help to shape the curriculum.⁷⁵ Commonly, institutions expect academic units to report any intention to seek PSRB accreditation as part of programme approval, and to report on any accreditation or reaccreditation during programme review.⁷⁶ One institution was recommended to monitor the status of its PSRB accreditations and to ensure that PSRB requirements were considered in the approval, monitoring and review of programmes.⁷⁷ A few reports noted broader relations with professional organisations.⁷⁸

29 Some reports note how institutions extract matters of broad significance from PSRB reports,⁷⁹ or in a few instances how they could do so more effectively.⁸⁰ Features of good

⁶⁹ Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 74

⁷⁰ Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 27

⁷¹ University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 95

⁷² University of Salford, paragraph 54

⁷³ Bournemouth University, paragraph 33; Coventry University, paragraph 44

⁷⁴ Aston University, paragraph 33

⁷⁵ For example University of Bristol, paragraphs 36, 74

⁷⁶ Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 54; Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 72; Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraph 65; Loughborough University, paragraph 77; Roehampton University, paragraph 42; University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 67; University of Brighton, paragraphs 61, 87, 88; University of Cambridge, paragraph 69; University of Lincoln, paragraph 89; University of Reading, paragraph 68; University of Salford, paragraph 54; University of Southampton, paragraph 33; University of Sussex, paragraph 52; University of York, paragraph 82; Aston University, paragraph 65; Coventry University, paragraph 58; Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 41; Open University, paragraphs 60, 79; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 101; University College London, paragraph 67, 75; University of Bath, paragraph 50; University of Birmingham, paragraph 69; University of Bristol, paragraph 74; University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 61; University of Durham, paragraph 49; University of East Anglia, paragraph 36; University of Greenwich, paragraph 54; University of Hertfordshire, paragraphs 36, 50; University of Hull, paragraph 40; University of Liverpool, paragraph 39; University of Oxford, paragraphs 35, 77; University of Portsmouth, paragraphs 28, 35; University of Surrey, paragraph 72; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 50

⁷⁷ University College for the Creative Arts, paragraphs 49, 50

⁷⁸ Royal College of Music, paragraph 82; University College Falmouth, paragraph 60; Bath Spa University, paragraph 57; Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 53

⁷⁹ Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 53; Loughborough University, paragraph 77; Roehampton University, paragraph 43; University of Brighton, paragraph 63; University of York, paragraph 82; Coventry University, paragraph 59; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 98; University College London, paragraph 67; University of Birmingham, paragraph 69; University of Greenwich, paragraph 55

practice were identified in one institution's external audit of compliance with PSRB requirements and in another institution's steps to improve its overview of interaction with PSRBs at all levels.⁸¹

Appointment and use of external examiners

30 This theme covers how external examiners are nominated and appointed, how they are inducted and trained, and the tasks the institution expects them to undertake. It also covers a few instances where audit reports have concluded that external examiners should have been appointed or used but were not.

31 In general, external examiners are appointed and used in accordance with the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*. External examiners have a primary role in helping institutions to set and maintain the standards of their awards (*Section 4, precept 1*). They also contribute to the assurance and enhancement of learning opportunities, for example by drawing attention to inconsistencies on collaborative programmes or by commending the effectiveness of the relationship between teaching and research.⁸² In two institutions the audit reports identified features of widespread good practice in the overall use made of the external examiner system in securing the standards of their awards⁸³ and in the rigour of external examiner nomination, induction and briefing, including a well-informed annual external examiners' forum.⁸⁴ However, in another, the audit team recommended that procedures should be revised to enhance the role of external examiners in securing the standards of its awards.⁸⁵ Otherwise, institutions fall between these extremes, with frameworks that are generally fit for purpose but may need improving in some respects.

Levels of external examining

32 Institutions may operate examination boards at programme or award level only, or at both module and programme or award levels, with external examiners appointed for the two levels separately (although a module external may also serve as a programme external). Institutions sometimes have additional faculty or institutional levels, each with external examiners.⁸⁶ A few institutions appoint chief external examiners to oversee the whole process and ensure consistency.⁸⁷ One institution was recommended to ensure that its external examiners were fully involved in the business of all relevant examination committees,⁸⁸ another to ensure sufficient involvement of external examiners with its joint honours awards,⁸⁹ and a third to ensure that its allocation of external examiners matched a new curriculum framework.⁹⁰

⁸⁰ University of Southampton, paragraph 33; University of Sussex, paragraph 52; City University London, paragraph 40; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 102; University College London, paragraph 75

⁸¹ Salford University, paragraph 38; De Montfort University, paragraph 64

⁸² Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraph 90; City University London, paragraph 97

⁸³ University of Chichester, paragraph 59

⁸⁴ Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 55

⁸⁵ Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraphs 35, 38

⁸⁶ University of Lincoln, paragraph 58; University of Winchester, paragraph 32

⁸⁷ Keele University, paragraph 55; University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 37; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 28; University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 37

⁸⁸ University of Bradford, paragraph 63

⁸⁹ Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 33

⁹⁰ University of Bournemouth, paragraph 31

Criteria for appointment

33 Nominations typically come from the academic unit responsible for the programme, which for collaborative provision may be the partner institution, but the appointment is typically made at institutional level (possibly under powers delegated to a senior committee or post-holder). One institution was recommended to clarify the roles of individuals and committees in appointing and approving external examiners, particularly for cases that fell outside the usual criteria.⁹¹

34 Institutions set out criteria for the appointment of external examiners, who must be suitably qualified and experienced (see the *Code of practice, Section 4*, precept 4). External examiners must be able to comment on academic standards in UK higher education, and one institution was recommended to ensure that this applied to external examiners for overseas collaborations.⁹² Another institution stipulates that external examiners familiar with UK higher education must partner external examiners who are not (for example, those appointed because of their professional expertise).⁹³ Similarly, a few reports mention that inexperienced external examiners may be mentored by those with experience.⁹⁴ In a few instances where performance by individual students is part of the final assessment, external examiners provide overarching scrutiny, but external experts are appointed to help conduct and standardise the assessments.⁹⁵ External examiners for special modes of learning, such as distance learning and sometimes work-based learning, are expected to have relevant experience as well as subject expertise.⁹⁶

35 External examiners must also be sufficiently independent of the institution and of the academic unit responsible for the programme being assessed (see the *Code of practice, Section 4*, precept 6). Hence they serve a maximum term, often three or four years, after which they cannot be reappointed until a minimum period of time has elapsed, usually at least the duration of their previous appointment. External examiners should not act reciprocally for an academic unit which provides external examiners for their home academic unit, and a few institutions record and monitor the range of institutions from which their external examiners are appointed to ensure sufficient diversity,⁹⁷ in one instance with a rigorous and systematic approach considered to be a feature of good practice.⁹⁸ One institution monitored where its own staff are external examiners, which was noted as particularly effective practice,⁹⁹ while two others took steps to encourage more staff to become external examiners.¹⁰⁰ One audit report expressed doubt about how the institution could monitor the balance of appointments when these were made by faculties.¹⁰¹

⁹¹ University of Greenwich, paragraph 43

⁹² Lancaster University, paragraph 88

⁹³ Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 32

⁹⁴ University College Falmouth, paragraph 20; University of Leeds, paragraph 34; University of the Arts London, paragraph 45; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 40; University of Sunderland, paragraph 29

⁹⁵ Royal College of Music, paragraph 27; Royal Academy of Music, paragraphs 36-38; Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraphs 35, 36; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 40

⁹⁶ University of Lincoln, paragraph 63

⁹⁷ University of Brighton, paragraph 42; University of Chichester, paragraph 56; University of Lincoln, paragraph 61; Middlesex University, paragraphs 25, 26; University of Birmingham, paragraph 47; University of Sunderland, paragraph 30

⁹⁸ Southampton Solent University, paragraph 90

⁹⁹ School of Pharmacy, paragraph 59

¹⁰⁰ University College Falmouth, paragraph 129; University of Brighton, paragraph 46

¹⁰¹ University of Salford, paragraph 30

Roles and responsibilities

36 Roles and responsibilities are set out in documentation and online. External examiners are expected to attend examination boards, at least for decisions on awards, and frequently on progression as well. Often external examiners also report on matters that relate to the quality of learning opportunities.¹⁰² External examiners are expected to report to the institution each year on their activities; how these reports are used is discussed as a separate theme on page 16. Audit reports do not always describe these matters, but may instead refer to them being available in documentation that fits the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 4*.

37 Sometimes external examiners meet students informally,¹⁰³ in one instance by video-link with distance-learning students.¹⁰⁴ One report emphasised that when such meetings take place it is important for students to understand that the purpose is not to assess them but to help the external examiner appreciate the context for their programme of study.¹⁰⁵

Induction

38 External examiners are mostly offered induction, from the institution centrally,¹⁰⁶ from the relevant academic unit,¹⁰⁷ or from both.¹⁰⁸ One institution was recommended to improve induction by ensuring that it covered all the activities to be undertaken,¹⁰⁹ while others were encouraged to make induction more systematic and better attended.¹¹⁰ Two institutions were recommended to strengthen their arrangements for the briefing and support of external examiners, one to help those new to the role or acting for collaborative provision, and the other to elicit more informative reports.¹¹¹ Features of good practice were noted at one institution where a rigorous external examiner nomination process was followed by thorough induction and briefing,¹¹² and at another where case studies were used in

¹⁰² For example Royal Agricultural College, paragraphs 48, 85; Royal College of Art, paragraphs 76, 79; Royal College of Music, paragraph 71; University College Falmouth, paragraphs 53, 56; University College London, paragraph 175

¹⁰³ Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 31; Royal Agricultural College, paragraphs 23, 48; University College Falmouth, paragraph 57; Bath Spa University, paragraph 40

¹⁰⁴ University of Sheffield, paragraph 76

¹⁰⁵ Royal College of Art, paragraph 41

¹⁰⁶ University College Falmouth, paragraph 20; Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 41; Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraph 32; Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 37; University of Bradford, paragraph 57; University of Chichester, paragraph 57; University of Lincoln, paragraph 60; University of Salford, paragraph 30; University of the Arts London, paragraph 45; De Montfort University, paragraph 49; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 40; Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 45; Middlesex University, paragraph 25; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 47; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 84; University of Birmingham, paragraph 47; University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 36; University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 28; University of Kent, paragraph 36; University of Portsmouth, paragraph 52; University of Sunderland, paragraph 29; University of Surrey, paragraph 61; University of Winchester, paragraph 31; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 21

¹⁰⁷ Royal College of Art, paragraph 40; School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraph 41; Leeds College of Music, paragraph 40; University of Essex, paragraph 40; University of Southampton, paragraph 36; University of York, paragraph 54; Lancaster University, paragraph 31; Rose Bruford College, paragraph 56; University College London, paragraph 58; University of East Anglia, paragraph 27; University of Leicester, paragraph 18; University of Warwick, paragraph 36

¹⁰⁸ University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 38; University of Brighton, paragraph 44; University of Essex, paragraph 29; University of Reading, paragraph 46; Bournemouth University, paragraph 26; Coventry University, paragraph 49; Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 37; University of Hull, paragraph 33

¹⁰⁹ University of Buckingham, paragraph 40

¹¹⁰ City University London, paragraph 36; Coventry University, paragraph 49; University of East Anglia, paragraph 27

¹¹¹ Goldsmiths' College, paragraphs 26, 110; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 29

¹¹² Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 55

induction.¹¹³ A third institution incorporated induction workshops commended by external examiners in one academic unit into its own university-level workshops.¹¹⁴ Where formal face-to-face induction is not provided, reports confirm that briefing is provided through documentation.

Collaborative provision

39 For collaborative provision, audit reports typically note that external examiners are appointed by a process comparable to that for in-house programmes.¹¹⁵ When the same programme is delivered at the awarding institution and at a partner institution, the same external examiner is often appointed so as to compare the different instances of delivery.¹¹⁶ Some institutions prompt such external examiners to report specifically on collaborative provision,¹¹⁷ and one was recommended to do so.¹¹⁸

Postgraduate research degree programmes

40 For postgraduate research degree programmes, the *Handbook for institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland* (QAA 2006) explains that audit teams are required to report specifically upon how far institutional arrangements align with the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes* (second edition, QAA 2004). Precept 23 in that section says that 'Research degree assessment procedures must...include input from an external examiner...'. Audit reports either confirm explicitly that external examiners are appointed, or instead do so implicitly by referring to conformity with the institution's regulations and confirming their alignment with the *Code of practice, Section 1* as a whole. However, audit reports do not always comment further on the assessment process for postgraduate research students.

41 A few audit reports indicate explicitly that the external examiners must also be sufficiently independent of the institution and the student's research project.¹¹⁹ A few other reports note that more than one external examiner must be appointed where the candidate is a member of staff at the institution.¹²⁰ One audit report questioned the added value of two layers of institutional approval for external examiners for each individual student.¹²¹ Another report noted the institution's lack of oversight of the appointment process, which contributed to a recommendation to review delegation within its committee structure.¹²² In another institution, the consideration of external examiner nominations was reported to be thorough and rigorous.¹²³

¹¹³ University of Portsmouth, paragraph 52

¹¹⁴ University of Salford, paragraph 91

¹¹⁵ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 164; Bath Spa University, paragraph 139; Keele University, paragraph 161; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 54; University College London, paragraph 183; University of Bath, paragraph 153

¹¹⁶ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 63; Bath Spa University, paragraph 38; Roehampton University, paragraph 26; University of Brighton, paragraph 52; University of Exeter, paragraph 48; University of Leeds, paragraph 215; University of Lincoln, paragraphs 63, 178; De Montfort University, paragraphs 188, 139; University of Northampton, paragraph 88

¹¹⁷ For example De Montfort University, paragraph 188

¹¹⁸ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 43

¹¹⁹ University of Brighton, paragraph 53; University of Cambridge, paragraph 163; University of Essex, paragraph 130; University of Southampton, paragraph 131; De Montfort University, paragraph 217; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 200

¹²⁰ Bath Spa University, paragraph 171; University of Brighton, paragraph 53; University of Essex, paragraph 131; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 270; University of East Anglia, paragraph 157; University of Hull, paragraph 150; University of Leicester, paragraph 93; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 169

¹²¹ University of Northampton, paragraph 111

¹²² Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 136

¹²³ Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 45

42 Audit reports for three specialist colleges noted external input to the process of approving transfers to doctoral registration.¹²⁴ In one institution the higher degrees committee had an external member.¹²⁵

Use of external examiners' reports

43 External examiners work primarily with the individual academic units responsible for assessment, in particular attending examination boards at module and programme level. However, external examiners are expected to report to the institution on their work (see the *Code of practice, Section 4*, precept 10), and this theme covers how the institution uses these reports.

Handling reports

44 *The Code of practice, Section 4* states that institutions should ask external examiners to submit written reports on award standards and the assessment process in a specified format to the head of the institution, or a designated person, and should ensure that the reports are considered not only at subject level but also at institutional level; institutions should also respond to comments and recommendations made by external examiners (precepts 12-14). One institution was recommended to ensure that examiners reported in the correct format, another to introduce a standard format,¹²⁶ and two others to include additional questions to secure responses on specific topics such as enhancement and collaborative provision.¹²⁷ Two more institutions were recommended to formalise their mechanisms for considering and responding to external examiners' reports.¹²⁸ One institution's use of its information management system to process external examiner reports contributed to a feature of good practice.¹²⁹

45 Some reports note instances where not all provision is subject to systematic scrutiny by external examiners. For example, one audit report recommended that the institution should consider extending the involvement of external examiners in the assessment of electives beyond sampling work from only a fraction of such courses each year.¹³⁰ Another report recommended that the institution should reconsider the lack of external examiner input to an institutional committee that could moderate and alter marks from examination boards.¹³¹

46 Delayed external examiners' reports lead to corresponding delays in completing annual monitoring. Some institutions were encouraged to make greater efforts to ensure timely receipt of reports.¹³²

Responding to reports

47 Audit reports make it clear that institutions ensure that external examiners' reports receive responses as expected. Some institutions require responses to be approved outside

¹²⁴ Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 125; Royal College of Art, paragraph 239; Royal College of Music, paragraph 198

¹²⁵ Bath Spa University, paragraph 151

¹²⁶ University of Bradford, paragraph 59; University of Cambridge, paragraph 32

¹²⁷ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 43; University of Portsmouth, paragraph 54

¹²⁸ Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 43; London Business School, paragraph 52

¹²⁹ University of Kent, paragraph 39

¹³⁰ London Business School, paragraph 46

¹³¹ Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 24

¹³² School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraphs 17, 42; School of Pharmacy, paragraphs 65, 66; University of Bradford, paragraph 61

the relevant academic unit before they are sent, especially for matters at institutional level.¹³³ Most institutions require academic units to submit their responses as part of annual monitoring.

Overview reports

48 Audit reports observe that most institutions compile an overview report summarising the issues raised by external examiners. This enables the institution to identify matters that are of significance beyond individual programmes which, when addressed, can thereby enhance quality.¹³⁴ Two institutions that did not compile such a report were recommended to do so, and another to develop the use of such a report.¹³⁵ A few institutions compiled separate overview reports for undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision.¹³⁶ Features of good practice were noted in two institutions that had systematic procedures for generating and considering external examiners' reports and in a third that used its overview of external examiners' reports to enhance its induction workshops.¹³⁷

49 Institutions may produce their overview reports directly from the external examiners' reports or indirectly through a summary of annual monitoring reports. The latter route relies on a distillation of summaries of the reports, and three audit reports found that this did not give the full picture captured by the originals.¹³⁸ This suggests that in order to extract the maximum benefit from external examiners' reports, particularly in managing the standards of their awards, institutions should compile an overview directly from the actual reports. Elsewhere, an institution was recommended to improve its reporting of key themes in the overview report.¹³⁹

Sharing reports with students

50 As noted in paragraph 7, later audits among those reviewed here were expected to report on how institutions shared external examiners' reports with students or their

¹³³ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraphs 44, 45; Keele University, paragraph 49; University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 39; University of Bradford, paragraph 58; University of Sheffield, paragraph 30; University of the Arts London, paragraph 45; Aston University, paragraph 39; City University, paragraph 35; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 49; University of Birmingham, paragraph 49; University of Kent, paragraph 37; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 45

¹³⁴ Royal College of Art, paragraphs 158, 159; School of Pharmacy, paragraph 62; University College Falmouth, paragraph 22; Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 46; Bath Spa University, paragraph 41; Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraph 35; Keele University, paragraph 50; Leeds College of Music, paragraph 43; London Business School, paragraph 49; University of Brighton, paragraph 49; University of Cambridge, paragraph 33; University of Exeter, paragraph 45; University of Leeds, paragraph 38; University of Lincoln, paragraph 66; University of Southampton, paragraphs 37, 38; University of Sussex, paragraph 34; University of York, paragraph 56; Bournemouth University, paragraph 30; Coventry University, paragraphs 160, 55; Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 27; Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 13; Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 38; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 47; Rose Bruford College, paragraph 59; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 50; University of Bristol, paragraph 41; University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 40; University of Durham, paragraph 40; University of East Anglia, paragraph 31; University of Greenwich, paragraph 47; University of Liverpool, paragraph 34; University of Northampton, paragraph 20; University of Sunderland, paragraph 31; University of Surrey, paragraph 64; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 45; University of Warwick, paragraph 39; University of Winchester, paragraph 32; University of Wolverhampton, paragraphs 22, 24

¹³⁵ Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 26; Leeds College of Music, paragraph 130; University of Buckingham, paragraph 43

¹³⁶ Royal College of Music, paragraph 44; University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 41; Salford, paragraph 30; University College London, paragraph 64; University of Leicester, paragraph 20

¹³⁷ University of Sheffield, paragraphs 30, 34; Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraph 13; University of Salford, paragraph 91

¹³⁸ Royal College of Music, paragraph 44; School of Pharmacy, paragraph 63; University College Falmouth, paragraph 23

¹³⁹ University of Leeds, paragraphs 41, 42

representatives. Many confirmed that this was being done,¹⁴⁰ though sometimes not uniformly,¹⁴¹ or as summaries rather than verbatim,¹⁴² and sometimes by diverse means.¹⁴³ A few reports recommended that it should be done¹⁴⁴ or that it should be done more directly and systematically,¹⁴⁵ or encouraged institutions to improve their procedures.¹⁴⁶ A few audit reports noted that, even in institutions where the audit team had seen evidence of reports being shared with students, not all students who met the team could confirm having seen the reports.¹⁴⁷

Collaborative provision

51 For collaborative provision, a particular issue is how the institution uses external examiners' reports to ensure that the standards of awards and the quality of learning opportunities for students at partner institutions are comparable to those for in-house students. Where the same programme is offered in house and at a collaborative partner, typically the same examiner is appointed for both and asked to comment specifically on comparability.¹⁴⁸ One institution was recommended to make reporting on collaborative provision a formal requirement.¹⁴⁹ Another institution running joint programmes with overseas partners was encouraged to find ways to give its external examiners oversight of the standards of the grades awarded at the partners that contribute directly to the institution's own awards.¹⁵⁰

Postgraduate research degree programmes

52 In one institution, a requirement for examiners to submit preliminary reports before the viva, and a joint report on the outcome, contributed to a structured approach to enhancement of the learning environment for postgraduate research students, which was seen as a feature of good practice.¹⁵¹ The same practice is expected in the *Code of practice*

¹⁴⁰ Royal College of Art, paragraph 78; University College Falmouth, paragraph 24; Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 44; Leeds College of Music, paragraph 43; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraph 20; Loughborough University, paragraph 51; Roehampton University, paragraph 29; University of Brighton, paragraph 48; University of Chichester, paragraph 58; University of Exeter, paragraph 41; University of Lincoln, paragraph 66; University of Salford, paragraph 32; Coventry University, paragraph 51; De Montfort University, paragraph 50; Lancaster University, paragraph 32; Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 53; University of Bath, paragraph 62; University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 30; University of Northampton, paragraph 22; University of Sunderland, paragraph 32; University of Winchester, paragraph 113

¹⁴¹ University of Cambridge, paragraph 33; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 52; University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 40

¹⁴² University of Reading, paragraph 47; University of Northampton, paragraph 22; University of Portsmouth, paragraphs 45, 55; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 25

¹⁴³ University of Oxford, paragraph 41

¹⁴⁴ Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 50; Open University, paragraph 57; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 25

¹⁴⁵ Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 154; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 42; Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraphs 12, 86; Middlesex University, paragraph 27; Open University, paragraph 55; University of Hull, paragraph 160; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 25

¹⁴⁶ University of Essex, paragraph 31; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 30; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 52; University College London, paragraph 65; University of Greenwich, paragraph 46; University of Surrey, paragraph 62

¹⁴⁷ Keele University, paragraph 53; University of Salford, paragraph 32; University of Sussex, paragraph 33; University of Birmingham, paragraph 48; University of East Anglia, paragraph 32; University of Surrey, paragraph 62; University of Warwick, paragraph 41

¹⁴⁸ For example University of Durham, paragraph 135; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 23

¹⁴⁹ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 43

¹⁵⁰ London Business School, paragraphs 99, 104, 107

¹⁵¹ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 183

Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes and is reported in other institutions.¹⁵² Its recognition as a feature of good practice depends on the context and implementation.

53 Institutions can gain an external perspective on their postgraduate research degree provision from an overview of external examiners' reports, as suggested in the explanation of precept 4 in the *Code of practice, Section 1*. However, because there is at least one external examiner's report for each research degree candidate, obtaining an overview is harder than for taught programmes, where there may be only one examiner's report for a programme comprising many candidates. Some audit reports note explicitly how institutions consider examiners' reports for postgraduate degrees as a whole, typically through overview reports to a high-level committee.¹⁵³ One institution that did not use an overview of external examiners' reports was recommended to do so.¹⁵⁴ Otherwise, audit reports confirm implicitly that this expectation is met by confirming that the institution's practices align with the *Code of practice, Section 1*.

The themes in context

54 As noted in discussing the context for this report, external involvement in quality management is an essential focus for audit and as such permeates audit reports. Institutions have therefore been concerned first to respond to any recommendations arising from previous audits, and audit reports confirm that institutions have done so satisfactorily. Although public interest in higher education was increasing during the period of the audits, actual changes in external reference points were modest. Audit reports confirm that institutions had effective mechanisms to respond to those changes as a matter of course.

55 In relation to programme approval and review, the audit reports overwhelmingly confirm that institutions seek advice from external assessors, with only a handful of recommendations for improving their involvement and ensuring their independence (not only of the institution but also of prior involvement with the programme). Similar external involvement applies to collaborative provision.

56 The audit reports also confirm that institutions engage with the Academic Infrastructure and other external points of reference, typically by embedding their precepts in their own policies and procedures. Institutions also engage systematically and constructively with PSRBs relevant to their programmes. During 2009-10 QAA undertook an evaluation of the Academic Infrastructure, and now proposes to revise and restructure it in a way that would retain the key features of the existing components.¹⁵⁵ This revision had not been published at the time of writing, but the present report implies that institutions are well placed to work with the revised Academic Infrastructure when it is published.

57 The audit reports overwhelmingly confirm that institutions seek advice on assessment from independent external examiners for taught awards. The recommendations for improvement basically encourage institutions to implement more explicitly the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 4*, for example by ensuring that external examiners are suitably

¹⁵² For example University of Cambridge, paragraph 163; University College London, paragraph 204; University of Bristol, paragraph 132

¹⁵³ Royal College of Art, paragraphs 185, 240; Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 183; London Business School, paragraph 111; University of Leeds, paragraph 249; University of Salford, paragraph 30; De Montfort University, paragraph 198; Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 125; Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 121; Middlesex University, paragraph 92; Queen's University Belfast, paragraph 200; University of Bath, paragraph 164; University of Birmingham, paragraphs 50, 160; University of East Anglia, paragraph 31; University of Greenwich, paragraph 152; University of Northampton, paragraph 123; University of Warwick, paragraph 172

¹⁵⁴ University of Winchester, paragraph 113

¹⁵⁵ www.qaa.ac.uk/Newsroom/Consultations/Pages/academic-infrastructure-consultation.aspx

qualified and sufficiently independent. Following these recommendations will also bring practice closer to the recommendations in the recent Universities UK/GuildHE *Review of external examining arrangements in universities and colleges in the UK: Final report and recommendations* (Universities UK April 2011)¹⁵⁶, which build on the precepts in the *Code of practice, Section 4* (for example by proposing national criteria for the appointment of external examiners).

58 Perhaps most significant of the recent changes is the expectation that institutions will now share external examiners' reports on taught programmes with students or their representatives as a matter of course. Audit reports show that many institutions are doing so, but that some have been slow to share the whole report. Equally, students who met audit teams did not always recall seeing reports that were made available, so the mostly routine matters that such reports contain may not be very significant to students; to quote one audit team, 'Students reported that they did not find the reports to be of particular help or relevance to them'.¹⁵⁷

Trends

59 In the present, third, series, *Outcomes* reports each cover a broader area than in the previous series. Hence to discern trends it is necessary to compare the present report with several of its predecessors in the second series.

60 The *Outcomes* Series 2 report on *Validation and approval of new provision, and its periodic review*¹⁵⁸ noted that external involvement in programme approval could sometimes be improved, but that external involvement in programme review prompted a cluster of features of good practice, with rarely any recommendations for improvement. The present report confirms that external involvement in approval is now thoroughly embedded.

61 *Outcomes* Series 2 reports on individual aspects of the Academic Infrastructure found that institutions had embedded subject benchmark statements into their processes;¹⁵⁹ they were similarly embedding the FHEQ¹⁶⁰ and were becoming more confident in using programme specifications.¹⁶¹ The present report finds that all these aspects are now well embedded and working as intended. Another *Outcomes* Series 2 report¹⁶² found that there was constructive engagement with PSRBs at the level of the institution generally, as well as at the level of the relevant academic unit. The present report finds that this institutional engagement has continued to develop through overview reports on PSRB accreditation.

62 The *Outcomes* Series 2 report on *External examiners and their reports*¹⁶³ noted that arrangements were generally working well, but that there was scope for reports to be used

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www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/PolicyAndResearch/PolicyAreas/QualityAssurance/HowTheSystemWorks/Documents/Review%20of%20External%20Examining%20Final%20Report.pdf

¹⁵⁷ University College Falmouth, paragraph 24

¹⁵⁸ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-institutional-audit-Validation-approval-new-provision-Second-series.aspx

¹⁵⁹ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-from-institutional-audit-Second-series-Subject-benchmark-statements.aspx

¹⁶⁰ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-from-institutional-audit-Second-series-The-framework-for-higher-education-qualifications-in-England--Wales-and-No.aspx

¹⁶¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-from-institutional-audit-Second-series-Programme-specifications.aspx

¹⁶² www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-from-institutional-audit-Second-series-Institutions-work-with-employers-and-professional--statutory-and-regulator.aspx

¹⁶³ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-from-institutional-audit-Second-series-External-examiners-and-their-reports.aspx

more widely and for feedback on reports to be given more promptly. The present report finds continuing careful use of external examiners and their reports, with overview reports widespread but still not always used to best effect for enhancement. The series 2 report also found that institutions were responding well to the requirement to publish summaries of external examiners' reports on a dedicated website. This requirement changed into sharing reports with students or their representatives, where the present report finds that most institutions have made the necessary arrangements, though quite often implementation needs to improve.

63 Overall, since the *Outcomes* Series 2 reports, external involvement in quality management and the use of external reference points have become better understood and more effectively embedded into institutions' own processes.

Conclusions

64 Overall, reports confirm that institutions incorporate external contributions to their processes of programme approval and review and of assessment through the use of external assessors and external examiners. Similar externality applies to collaborative provision. Reports make a few recommendations for improving the involvement of external assessors and examiners and ensuring their independence. It may be reasonable to seek advice from external examiners on minor charges to programmes, especially in respect of assessment, and perhaps to seek informal advice on proposed major developments. However, the continuing involvement of external examiners with an academic unit compromises their independence, and so institutions should not use them as assessors for full programme approval or review.

65 The audit reports also confirm there is now a mature engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and with PSRBs. Some institutions go farther by bringing in external experts to help in their deliberations on institutional-level committees or local school or advisory boards (paragraphs 17 and 19) and by going out to benchmark their practice against other institutions (paragraph 27).

66 In general, institutions have effective mechanisms to obtain an overview of reports provided by external examiners for individual programmes. Institutions are thereby able to extract matters of significance across their provision for the purposes of enhancement or to inform induction of external examiners (paragraph 49).

67 The audit process looks for 'strong and scrupulous' use of external assessors and advisers. Given this stringent expectation, it is perhaps not surprising that the audit reports gave rise to many more recommendations for action than features of good practice. Recommendations were considered essential for five institutions (leading automatically to judgements of limited confidence in aspects of their arrangements), advisable for about a quarter of the institutions audited, and desirable for a similar proportion. Features of good practice were identified in just over a quarter of the institutions audited (a few of which were simultaneously the subject of recommendations).¹⁶⁴

68 This analysis shows that the great majority of institutions do make sufficiently strong and scrupulous use of external assessors and advisers, as confirmed implicitly by audit reports that characterise procedures for approval and review and for external examining as 'effective' or 'sound'. Many reports also use 'strong and scrupulous' explicitly for one

¹⁶⁴ University of Chichester, Leeds Trinity and All Saints, Liverpool Hope University, Open University, Southampton Solent University, University of Portsmouth

procedure or the other¹⁶⁵ or describe procedures as 'rigorous' or 'robust'.¹⁶⁶ Thus the concept of external involvement in quality management is well understood and implemented effectively across the institutions covered by these reports.

¹⁶⁵ Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 36; Royal College of Art, paragraph 44; University College Falmouth, paragraph 26; Bath Spa University, paragraph 43; Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraph 33; Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 39; University of Essex, paragraph 32; University of Exeter, paragraph 49; University of Salford, paragraph 33; University of Sheffield, paragraph 29; University of Sussex, paragraph 35; Open University, paragraphs 47, 57; Rose Bruford College, paragraph 61; Southampton Solent University, paragraph 94; University of East Anglia, paragraph 33; University of Northampton, paragraph 23; University of Portsmouth, paragraph 56; University of the West of England, Bristol, paragraph 47; University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 26

¹⁶⁶ Anglia Ruskin University, paragraph 65; Bath Spa University, paragraphs 32, 37; Loughborough University, paragraph 55; University College for the Creative Arts, paragraph 41; University of Brighton, paragraph 54; University of Buckingham, paragraph 44; University of Cambridge, paragraphs 36, 41; University of Essex, paragraph 26; University of Exeter, paragraphs 35, 43; University of Reading, paragraph 49; University of Southampton, paragraph 38; Coventry University, paragraph 53; Lancaster University, paragraph 33; Liverpool Hope University, paragraphs 34, 51; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, paragraph 79; Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 39; University of Birmingham, paragraphs 45, 51; University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 28; University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 27; University of Leicester, paragraph 16; University of Oxford, paragraph 37; University of Surrey, paragraph 47; University of Warwick, paragraph 42

Appendix A: Features of good practice relating to external involvement in quality management

External assessors in programme approval and review

- the establishment and use of School Advisory Councils [including external members from relevant communities] which inform and enhance the development of the curriculum and student experience (Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 61)
- the use of external members on school boards contributing to the enhancement of the student experience (Bath Spa University, paragraph 58)
- internal quality audit [involving external advisers, paragraphs 41, 42] as a robust and effective process of periodic review (Keele University, paragraphs 42 and 81)
- the role of the external adviser to the Collaborative Programmes Quality Committee in supporting the development of collaborative provision (University of Chichester, paragraph 142)
- the quality management processes for validated provision, with particular reference to the use of external advisers and the annual meetings with students (City University, paragraph 95)
- the clarity and operation of the Stage Gate process for developing, monitoring and reviewing courses and awards [including scrupulous use of external assessors at several different points in the approval process] (Open University, paragraphs 46, 47)
- the strengthening of the College's quality assurance processes through the rigorous operation of the external examiner system and the involvement of independent external participants at institutional and course-level committees (Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 66)

External points of reference

- the institution's procedures for benchmarking of programmes at validation (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, paragraph 27)
- the full engagement with the Academic Infrastructure (University of Chichester, paragraph 67)
- the University's prompt and effective response to national external initiatives and to matters raised internally through both informal and formal channels (University of Sheffield, paragraphs 43 and 53 to 56)
- the systematic visits by academic and professional staff to other higher education institutions to benchmark University practice (Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 74)
- the structured approach to the use of the *Code of practice* in the management of learning opportunities in on-campus provision (University of Northampton, paragraph 28)
- the regular review and updating of University policies with consistent use of gap analysis [including reviewing changes in the *Code of practice*] (University of Portsmouth, paragraphs 16, 58, 80)
- the structured way in which the University uses information about practice elsewhere in the sector in the development of its policies and procedures, as in the review and revision of the approach to personal tutoring (University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 95)

Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

- the steps the University has taken to improve its overview of interaction with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies at programme, school and faculty level (University of Salford, paragraph 38)
- the rigorous approach taken by the University to maintain an institutional overview of its professional body engagements (De Montfort University, paragraph 64)

Appointment and use of external examiners

- the central register of external examinerships held by staff to avoid reciprocity (School of Pharmacy, paragraph 59)
- the structured approach to enhancement of the learning environment for postgraduate research students [including requiring external examiners to submit preliminary reports before the viva and a joint report on the outcome] (Anglia Ruskin University, Section 6)
- the contribution to staff development and enhancement of practice made by the annual workshop to prepare staff to be external examiners (University of Brighton, paragraph 46)
- the use made by the University of the external examiner system in securing the standards of its awards (University of Chichester, paragraph 59)
- the role of the External Examiners Committee in supporting the external examiner system (University of Lincoln, paragraph 67)
- the identification of good practice in the induction of external examiners in one school leading to its adoption at University level (University of Salford, paragraph 91)
- the rigour of the external examiner nomination process for both taught and research degree provision; the thorough induction and briefing provided by the College for its external examiners, and the well-informed annual External Examiners Forum (Royal Veterinary College, paragraph 55)
- the rigorous and systematic approach taken to reviewing the appointment of external examiners across the University in order to ensure independence and to avoid reciprocity (Southampton Solent University, paragraph 90)
- the quality, clarity and accessibility of published guidance for staff and students [including that relevant to external examiners of taught and research awards] (University College London, paragraphs 29, 35, 54, 88, 96, 138, 156, 194, 201 and 215)
- the University's approach to facilitating staff engagement in quality assurance and quality enhancement through the extensive use of its information management system [among other things, to process external examiner reports] (University of Kent, paragraphs 28, 39)
- the provision of case-studies for the training of external examiners (University of Portsmouth, paragraph 52)

Use of external examiners' reports

- the procedures for consideration of external examiners' reports, which secure the requisite central overview and action in response to issues, both at the local level and those with university-wide implications (University of Sheffield, paragraphs 30 and 34)
- the use of the summary overview of external examiners' reports to contribute to the maintenance of standards and the enhancement of learning opportunities (Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraphs 13, 19, 69)

Appendix B: Recommendations relating to external involvement in quality management

External assessors in programme approval and review

- reconsider the role of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee to ensure that all validation decisions are fully informed and have appropriate externality (Royal Agricultural College, paragraphs 13, 31)
- revise its criteria for external appointments to periodic review panels to ensure that chairs have not recently been external examiners for the College's provision (Royal College of Music, paragraph 36)
- in the context of programme approval, develop guidelines for programme design, criteria for appointment of external subject specialists, and advice for such specialists on the nature of their roles [including, for external examiners, submitting reports within an acceptable time scale] (School of Oriental and African Studies, paragraphs 17 to 20)
- ensure adherence to programme validation procedures, and develop criteria for establishing the independence of external panel members (School of Pharmacy, paragraph 68)
- reflect on the processes of programme approval, monitoring and review with a view to ensuring that the opportunities for enhancement afforded by external involvement are capitalised upon; and the outcomes of the processes are fully reported so that good practice is effectively captured and quality enhancement supported (Loughborough University, paragraphs 44, 52, 88, 90, 91, 94, 119, 134)
- encourage schools to draw upon appropriate external academic contributions during programme development as an opportunity for enhancement as well as a means of strengthening the quality assurance of programme proposals (Roehampton University, paragraph 52)
- review the Academy's internal procedures for the guarantee of academic standards to ensure they are fit for purpose and are properly observed [including seeking external opinion during programme approval] (Royal Academy of Music, paragraphs 27, 31, 35)
- ensure that its arrangements for programme approval reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* [particularly given the *Code's* emphasis on externality] (University of Buckingham, paragraphs 35, 66)
- review the role of the external adviser in the programme approval process to ensure that there is appropriate impartial and critical scrutiny, including with respect to resources for learning (University of Chichester, paragraphs 34 and 106)
- consider producing supplementary operational guidance for the key quality assurance processes to support the consistent implementation of the Quality Assurance Manual [including criteria and procedures for the appointment of external members of validation and periodic academic review panels] (University of Lincoln, paragraphs 48, 57, 85, 105, 108)
- review the procedures by which the adequacy of learning resources for proposed programmes are recorded centrally [including referring resources to the scrutiny of external participants during validation] (University of Lincoln, paragraphs 93, 131)
- require an element of formal external academic input to programme approval (Lancaster University, paragraph 25)
- revise its procedures for the approval and amendment of courses and schemes [including robust external scrutiny before the approval of new courses] to ensure that the integrity of awards is always safeguarded (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 25)

- ensure that the recommendation made in the previous audit report, that periodic review be undertaken at regular intervals and that there should be a contribution from external peers that is always critical and robust, is addressed fully; and ensure that the overriding responsibility for the procedure, nature and timing of the periodic review process is determined by Academic Board or an appropriate subcommittee (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 33, 35)
- review and revise the procedures for programme approval with particular reference to the determination of the form of approval to be undertaken and the nomination and approval of internal and external panel members (Southampton Solent University, paragraph 54)
- reflect further on the ways in which central oversight of school-based periodic review is maintained and consider in particular whether provision for light touch reviews, and the relationship between professional, statutory and regulatory body reviews and internal reviews, should be more closely defined (University of Greenwich, paragraph 41)
- revise the process by which short courses that contribute to University awards are developed and approved, to include input external to the University, in order to ensure the appropriateness of level, content, learning outcomes and assessment (University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 23)
- review criteria for the appointment of external advisers in programme approval and review (University of Sunderland, paragraphs 19, 21, 26)

External points of reference

- develop a mechanism by which the College can assure itself that it has a systematic, ongoing, timely and effective engagement with all elements of the Academic Infrastructure (Royal College of Art, paragraph 62)
- establish an overarching framework for the management of the quality and standards of collaborative provision, which reflects both the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2*, and the experience of other United Kingdom (UK) institutions in identifying and managing any associated risks (Royal College of Music, paragraphs 52, 169, 174)
- expedite progress with the new quality assurance manual to meet the planned implementation date, ensuring that the Academic Infrastructure is embedded within it and that its contents and purpose are communicated to all staff (School of Pharmacy, paragraphs 44, 45, 66, 69)
- consider means by which the School can engage better with the broader higher education community, thus increasing its awareness and understanding of debates and practices within the sector (Central School of Speech and Drama, paragraphs 89, 90, 100, 116, 119)
- ensure that it develops and implements procedures for the systematic deliberative oversight of the quality and standards of its educational provision as a whole, with particular reference to the nature and level of its engagement with external reference points (London Business School, paragraph 70)
- establish, implement and monitor such a systematic set of institution-wide processes and reporting systems as will ensure the effective oversight of all aspects of its collaborative provision [among other things, to evaluate the alignment with the FHEQ of credit-bearing courses taken at partner institutions] (London Business School, paragraph 110)
- review the use of participants external to the University in programme approval and review, particularly to ensure that at least one appropriate academic external is present at each event (University of Bradford, paragraph 50)

- in the light of current norms and practices elsewhere within the higher education sector, reflect further upon the fitness for purpose of its existing practices in the following areas: the systematic engagement of committees and staff with the Academic Infrastructure (paragraphs 33 and 63), the provision of overview reports (paragraph 43), updating collaborative provision agreements (paragraph 102), the institutional use of statistical data (paragraph 111) and the independence of the complaints procedure for research students (University of Buckingham, paragraph 113)
- ensure the standards set for its taught postgraduate programmes are consistent with national expectations by systematically reviewing them against the appropriate level descriptor in the FHEQ (University of Buckingham, paragraph 48)
- consider its methods for ensuring that it has a clear, comprehensive overview of the current status of practice with regard to changes in the Academic Infrastructure (University of Leeds, paragraphs 76, 79)
- consider how to ensure that schools make effective and consistent use of the employer advisory boards to maximise the benefits from external input (Aston University, paragraph 72)
- develop systems and procedures for course approval and periodic review so that the University can assure itself of consistent engagement with the elements of the Academic Infrastructure across the full range of provision (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraph 47)
- engage with the *Code of practice* in a systematic way at institutional level to develop further its policies and procedures for the assurance of academic quality and standards (Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts, paragraphs 60, 62)
- consider how to make the process for responding to changes in external reference points more systematic (Nottingham Trent University, paragraphs 41, 45)
- ensure sufficient externality in panel membership for periodic review (the Degree Scheme Review), in particular a chair independent of the host faculty and an academic or other external member familiar with UK academic standards in relation to the programme (University of Bath, paragraph 46)
- further to the advice provided in the QAA Institutional audit report of 2004, give priority to the systematic calibration of the University's provision, against the guidance provided by the FHEQ on the matter of levels (University of East Anglia, paragraph 22)
- in order to eliminate ambiguity about the nature and standing of its taught undergraduate awards, review the nomenclature and status of those awards that fall outside the scope of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) but nonetheless use its terminology (University of Greenwich, paragraph 53)
- revise its plans for making awards based on credit-bearing short courses and/or the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) so that appropriate attention is paid to external reference points, including subject benchmark statements, in determining the name of such awards, and, in doing so, to review APEL protocols in support of the process (University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 35)
- consider further external benchmarking of postgraduate research degrees provision, for example, by implementing the Research Councils UK Concordat, and through institutional overview of external examiners' comments relating to research degree examinations (University of Winchester, paragraph 113)

Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

- develop robust processes for ensuring that professional body requirements and reports are considered fully at appropriate points in the approval, monitoring, and

review of courses (University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester, paragraphs 49 and 50)

Appointment and use of external examiners

- reconsider the use made of external examiners, in particular the lack of external examiner input at the College Examination Committee (Royal Agricultural College, paragraph 24)
- consider whether the current approaches to collaborative provision might be strengthened [among other things, by explicitly prompting external examiners to report on issues or good practice relating to provision in partner institutions], in line with the University's commitment to effective oversight of the student experience and the contribution of students to quality assurance (Anglia Ruskin University, paragraphs 43, 68, 151, 153, 158)
- review the operation of delegation within its committee structure, to ensure that all committees operate within their terms of reference, decisions are appropriately recorded, and that the academic board can exercise its full responsibilities for the security of academic standards [including oversight of the appointment of external examiners] and the quality of students' learning opportunities (Institute of Cancer Research, paragraphs 10, 24, 35, 136)
- give further consideration to the involvement of external examiners in the assessment process for elective courses (London Business School, paragraph 46)
- ensure that its policy of external examiner membership of assessment committees is fully implemented, and that external examiners are fully involved in the business of both assessment committees and boards of examiners; and ensure that all external examiners are made aware of the revised report pro forma, which addresses comparability of academic standards (University of Bradford, paragraphs 59, 63)
- review its arrangements for appointing, briefing and inducting external examiners (University of Buckingham, paragraph 40)
- introduce a template for external examiners' reports (University of Cambridge, paragraph 32)
- ensure that the impact of the development of its programme frameworks does not detract from its current ability to maintain appropriate oversight of the standards of awards and the quality of the student experience in individual programmes [for example, by ensuring that individual pathways are overseen by a single external examiner and appointing a chief external examiner] (Bournemouth University, paragraphs 15, 31, 97)
- strengthen the College's arrangements for the timely appointment, and the briefing and support, of its external examiners (Goldsmiths' College, paragraphs 26, 110)
- review the proposed arrangements for external examiner involvement in decisions on awards for joint honours programmes, so as to ensure appropriate externality (Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 33)
- ensure that external examiners for all overseas collaborations are competent to make independent and robust comparisons with United Kingdom national standards (Lancaster University, paragraph 88)
- implement, in collaboration with the University, revised procedures in the Institute that will enhance the role of external examiners in securing the standards of awards (Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts, paragraphs 29, 35, 38)
- revise the procedure for amending examination board decisions following the Chair's action in light of appeals, to ensure the timely and full involvement of external examiners (Southampton Solent University, paragraph 120)

- clarify the roles of individuals and deliberative committees in the approval and appointment of external examiners and the operation of the external examiner system (University of Greenwich, paragraph 43)
- revise the external examiner report form with prompts for more detailed comment, in particular about learning opportunities, in order to strengthen the enhancement value of these reports (University of Portsmouth, paragraph 54)

Use of external examiners' reports

- introduce more systematic institutional-level consideration, oversight and action on themes emerging from existing quality assurance procedures [including external examiners' reports] (Royal Agricultural College, paragraphs 26, 52, 86)
- review the approach to identification and consideration in the University's central deliberative bodies of matters of institution-wide significance [such as the summary report on external examining] to secure a more effective and systematic contribution to enhancement of the student learning experience (Anglia Ruskin University, paragraphs 80, 86-88, 122, 136 and 137)
- develop a formal mechanism, to ensure that full consideration is given to external examiners' reports; the outcomes of the consideration, including action taken is recorded; and that external examiners are provided with a formal considered response to their comments and recommendations and the actions taken (Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 43)
- formalise and document its management and consideration of, and response to, external examiners' reports (London Business School, paragraph 52)
- continue to develop institutional oversight of policies, processes, documentation and associated roles and responsibilities [such as identifying cross-College issues and good practice from external examiner reports] (Leeds College of Music, paragraphs 21, 26, 29, 129, 130)
- improve its ability to use key themes extracted from reports [including those from external examiners] and reviews, and use them in order to enhance practice across the institution (University of Leeds, paragraphs 23, 42, 192)
- develop a more formalised and systematic way of making external examiner reports accessible to student representatives on a programme (Goldsmiths' College, paragraph 154)
- ensure that external examiners' reports are shared with students in accordance with the HEFCE publication *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, Phase two outcomes*, October 2006 (HEFCE 06/45) (Leeds Metropolitan University, paragraphs 42, 130)
- ensure that external examiners' reports are shared with student representatives as a matter of course, in accordance with HEFCE 06/45 (Leeds Trinity and All Saints, paragraphs 12, 40, 86)
- take steps to share external examiner reports more widely with students (Liverpool Hope University, paragraph 50)
- all external examiners' reports are discussed by programme boards of study, including student representatives (Middlesex University, paragraph 27)
- enable student representatives to see external examiners' reports in full (Open University, paragraph 57)
- implement consistently the requirements in its Code of Practice that external examiner reports, and departmental responses to external examiner reports, are shared with students through staff-student committees (University of Hull, paragraph 160)
- provide student representatives with copies of external examiner reports in accordance with the HEFCE publication, *Review of the Quality Assurance*

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Framework, Phase two outcomes, October 2006/45 (University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 25)

Appendix C: Methodology used for producing papers in *Outcomes from Institutional audit*

The analysis of the Institutional audit reports which underlies the *Outcomes* papers is based on the headings set out in Annexes B and C of the *Handbook for Institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland* (2006).

For each published Institutional audit report, the text is taken from the report and technical annex published on QAA's website and converted to plain text format. The resulting files are checked for accuracy and introduced into a qualitative research software package, QSR NVivo8[®]. The software provides a wide range of tools to support indexing and searching and allows features of interest to be coded for further investigation. The basic coding of the reports follows the template headings set out in the *Handbook*. Further specific analysis is based on the more detailed text of the technical annex.

An audit team's judgements, its identification of features of good practice, and its recommendations appear in the introduction to the technical annex, with cross references to the main text where the grounds for identifying a feature of good practice, offering a recommendation and making a judgement are set out. These cross references are used to locate features of good practice and recommendations to the particular sections of the report to which they refer.

Individual *Outcomes* papers are written by experienced institutional auditors and audit secretaries. To assist in compiling the papers, reports produced using QSR NVivo8[®] are made available to authors to provide a broad picture of the overall distribution of features of good practice and recommendations in particular areas, as seen by the audit teams. The authors then consider this evidence in the context of the more detailed explanations given in the main text of the technical annex to establish themes for further discussion.

Appendix D: The Institutional audit reports

2006-07

Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication
Royal Agricultural College
Royal College of Art
Royal College of Music
School of Oriental and African Studies
School of Pharmacy
University College Falmouth

2007-08

Anglia Ruskin University
Bath Spa University
Central School of Speech and Drama
Institute of Cancer Research
Keele University
Leeds College of Music
London Business School
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Loughborough University
Roehampton University
Royal Academy of Music
Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance
University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester
University of Bradford
University of Brighton
University of Buckingham
University of Cambridge
University of Chichester
University of Essex
University of Exeter
University of Leeds
University of Lincoln
University of Reading
University of Salford
University of Sheffield
University of Southampton
University of Sussex
University of the Arts London
University of York

2008-09

Aston University
Bournemouth University
City University London
Coventry University
De Montfort University
Goldsmiths' College
Lancaster University
Leeds Metropolitan University
Leeds Trinity and All Saints¹⁶⁷
Liverpool Hope University
Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts
Middlesex University
Nottingham Trent University
Open University
Queen's University Belfast
Rose Bruford College
Royal Veterinary College
Southampton Solent University
University College London
University of Bath
University of Birmingham
University of Bristol
University of Central Lancashire
University of Durham
University of East Anglia
University of Greenwich
University of Hertfordshire
University of Hull
University of Kent
University of Leicester
University of Liverpool
University of Northampton
University of Oxford
University of Portsmouth
University of Sunderland
University of Surrey
University of the West of England, Bristol
University of Warwick
University of Winchester
University of Wolverhampton

The full text of the Institutional audit reports is available at
www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/Pages/Institutions-A-Z.aspx.

¹⁶⁷ Now Leeds Trinity University College.

Appendix E: Titles in *Outcomes from Institutional audit: 2007-09*

- *Managing academic standards*
- *Managing learning opportunities*
- *Student engagement and support*
- *External involvement in quality management*
- *Assessment and feedback*
- *Published information*

All published *Outcomes* papers can be found at
www.qaa.ac.uk/ImprovingHigherEducation/Pages/Outcomes.aspx.

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The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000

Fax 01452 557070

Email comms@qaa.ac.uk

Web www.qaa.ac.uk