



Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09

Assessment and feedback

Third series

Contents

Preface	1
Summary	2
Context	3
Themes	6
Programme approval, periodic review and annual monitoring	6
Programme approval	6
Periodic review	7
Annual monitoring	8
Engagement with the Academic Infrastructure	8
The adequacy of programme specifications and the identification of intended learning outcomes	10
The role of external examiners	11
The membership, conduct and reporting of examination boards	12
The clarity and consistency of institutional assessment policies and regulations ..	14
The provision and use of management information relating to students' academic performance	15
Feedback to students on their academic progress	17
Postgraduate research programmes	21
Trends in assessment	22
Conclusions	23
Appendix A: Features of good practice relating to assessment and feedback	26
Appendix B: Recommendations relating to assessment and feedback	27
Appendix C: Methodology used for producing papers in <i>Outcomes from Institutional Audit</i>	31
Appendix D: Institutional Audit reports	32
Appendix E: Titles in <i>Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09</i>	33

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 other evidence, for example from the National Student Survey, and of 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 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 those policy makers and managers within the higher education community with immediate responsibility for and interests 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

While there is marked diversity of assessment in UK higher education, in any given case it is closely aligned with intended learning outcomes. Most institutions had robust arrangements, with appropriate externality, for the scrutiny of these intended learning outcomes during programme approval and periodic review. The majority of recommendations were attached to annual monitoring, and several reports noted inconsistencies and variability in the annual monitoring process and its reporting. Devolved responsibility for minor programme changes runs the risk of cumulative change to programmes between periodic reviews.

The great majority of institutions engaged effectively with the Academic Infrastructure, with some programme specifications cited as examples of good practice. Most institutions had adopted intended learning outcomes and assessment within their specifications, and these were judged by audit teams to be at least adequate and often better.

Most reports indicated the crucial role played by external examiners in monitoring and moderating standards through assessment. While there were numerous instances of good practice there were also significant recommendations for the more effective deployment of external examiners, including enhanced feedback to promote a more strategic institutional approach to standards and assessment. Many institutions operate two-tier assessment boards with external examiners represented on both. The remit, conduct and reporting of examination boards provided several instances of good practice, and also some recommendations for action. Several institutions were cited for good practice in addressing plagiarism, combined with helpful guidance to students on how to avoid this.

The reports showed that most universities and colleges have institution-wide assessment regulations. While some allow limited variation to reflect distinct disciplinary cultures and to promote local ownership, this could lead to inconsistencies and variability of practice that audit teams considered it appropriate to rectify. In any event, diversity in marking and classification schemes was appreciably less than in previous audit cycles.

There were several examples of good practice in the provision of management information systems (MIS) to record student achievement and progression, with other higher education institutions cited as exemplars for the present and potential use they made of management data. However, there were also numerous recommendations for further action over MIS provision and use. Even where robust IT systems were in place, institutions did not always make entirely effective use of them.

Consistent with other information sources, many audit reports remarked on student concerns over the timeliness and quality of feedback on their assessed work. Even when institutional policies sought to address this issue, practice on the ground sometimes fell short. Several features of good practice were noted in the limited number of reports on collaborative activity, but there were also many recommendations to address shortcomings in this area.

The reports make clear that many institutions had recently revised or were in the process of revising their arrangements for supervising, reviewing and examining research students. Almost all included non-supervisory staff on progression panels, had introduced independent chairs for viva examinations, and precluded supervisory staff from acting as examiners.

Context

1 This account is based on a review of the outcomes of the 76 Institutional Audits conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) published between February 2007 and July 2009. A full list of the reports is given in Appendix D. A brief description of the methodology used in analysing the reports in this and other *Outcomes Series 3* papers is provided in Appendix C.

2 The institutions audited include long established collegiate and civic universities, campus universities founded in the 1960s following the Robbins Report, post-1992 universities created from former polytechnics, and recent universities and university colleges formed from colleges of higher education, as well as several monotechnic and specialist institutions. Student numbers range from a few hundred to tens of thousands. In other words, the audit reports provide a representative sample of the current range and diversity of institutions within the higher education sector.

3 As independent institutions, universities are responsible for the design, monitoring and revision of their own assessment regimes within the cycle of initial programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review. Such work is typically undertaken by disciplinary, cross or multi-disciplinary teams as appropriate. Both initial approval and periodic review typically involve external expert scrutiny including, where relevant, the views of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) while annual monitoring is informed by the views of external examiners. There is thus a significant external perspective on the design and outcomes of assessment, as on other aspects of programme design.

4 Reference points for both internal and external review are provided by the elements of the Academic Infrastructure: the level and qualification descriptors of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*, subject benchmark statements, and the 10 sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*. The most relevant of these for assessment are *Section 4: External examining*; *Section 6: Assessment of students*; and *Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. Central to assuring standards and quality is the production of a specification for each programme, detailing its intended learning outcomes and the associated assessment through which students are given the opportunity to demonstrate their mastery of these outcomes.² Similar specifications may also be produced at module or other sub-programme levels, but in all cases congruence of intended learning outcomes with modes and nature of assessment is crucial for securing standards.

5 All the audited institutions could be expected to be familiar with the elements of the Academic Infrastructure. Revised versions of *Section 6: Assessment of students* and *Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* were published in 2006, so that institutions audited early in the cycle were unlikely to have had an opportunity to consider these formally and implement any consequential changes. However, the revisions can be viewed as refinements rather than radical changes and, as such, are unlikely to have led to marked differences of practice between those institutions audited early and those audited later in the cycle.

6 Other higher education developments with potential impact on assessment occurred prior to and during the audit period. They included: the publication of the findings of

² *Guidelines for preparing programme specifications*, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Guidelines-for-preparing-programme-specifications.aspx.

Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09

the National Student Survey (NSS) from 2005 onwards;³ the reports of the Burgess Group on degree classification and measuring and recording student achievement (2004,⁴ 2006,⁵ 2007⁶); and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)'s review of the Quality Assurance Framework (2006),⁷ which indicated that institutions should routinely share external examiners' reports with student representatives. In 2005-06 QAA undertook reviews of research degree programmes in England and Northern Ireland⁸ and separately in Wales.⁹ Following publication of the *Outcomes Series 2* papers and concerns being voiced about higher education quality and standards in summer 2008, the Parliamentary Select Committee on Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills initiated an enquiry into students and universities.¹⁰ At the same time QAA undertook a series of Thematic Enquiries, including one on assessment and degree classification,¹¹ while HEFCE conducted its own investigation of teaching quality and the student experience.¹²

7 Successive NSS results have shown lower levels of satisfaction and expressions of concern among students about the quality and timeliness of the feedback they receive on their assessed work compared with most other aspects of the student experience. Such concern is not confined to a small minority of universities or any particular type of institution; the problem is sector-wide. It is, however, one that many institutions have recognised and sought to address; some at least in part prompted by the growing influence of university league tables both as an information source for potential candidates and as a reputational marker. Some further details are given in paragraphs 61-62.

8 The term 'assessment' has varied connotations within higher education. It is most obviously a means of establishing the knowledge and understanding of those students being assessed. But it also serves as a basis for calibrating the standards of educational provision at module/unit, programme, programme cluster, and institutional levels. Ideally, appropriately designed assessment also serves a formative educational function, extending students' depth and understanding¹³ in addition to its purely evaluative aspects.

9 Current assessment is typically much more diverse than the traditional 'sudden death' unseen examination paper taken as the culmination of a higher education programme. Most honours degree programmes include an assessed dissertation, extended essay or project, and there is often a sizeable component of summative, as well as formative, coursework. Some programmes incorporate open-book examinations, or may make provision for group work, and peer or self-assessment. Many programmes, at all levels, include a component of practical work which may in some cases constitute the entirety of the assessment.

10 The drivers for widening participation; the need to evaluate and accredit prior learning including experiential learning, to assess other skills and expertise beyond the

³ www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/nss/.

⁴ Universities UK (2004) *Measuring and recording student achievement: Report of the Scoping Group*.

⁵ Universities UK (2006) *Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England: Final report of the Burgess Group*.

⁶ Universities UK (2007) *Beyond the honours degree classification: The Burgess Group final report*.

⁷ HEFCE (2006) *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*.

⁸ QAA (2007) *Review of postgraduate research degree programmes: England and Northern Ireland*.

⁹ QAA (2007) *Review of postgraduate research degree programmes: Wales*.

¹⁰ Parliamentary Select Committee for Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills report: *Students and Universities*, July 2009.

¹¹ QAA (2009) *Thematic enquiries into concerns about academic quality and standards in higher education in England*.

¹² HEFCE (2009) *Report of the sub-committee for Teaching, Quality, and the Student Experience: HEFCE's statutory responsibility for quality assurance*.

¹³ See the examples of good practice cited in The University of Liverpool annex paragraph 50.

formally academic, and to support non-traditional students in higher education all have implications for assessment design. So too, does the responsibility to provide satisfactory alternative assessment for students with disabilities (*Code of practice, Section 3*), or those with other compelling reasons why the 'standard' assessment is inappropriate. There is a need to design assessment for the growing numbers of part-time students, those in collaborative provision, and those on distance learning programmes (*Code of practice, Section 2*). Increasing numbers of students are combining study in higher education with work, and the assessment of placement and work-based learning in particular presents challenges not usually encountered in programmes that are wholly campus-based (*Code of practice, Section 9*). Arrangements for the progression and assessment of research students have also been reviewed (*Code of practice, Section 1*). Finally, over the audit period covered in this paper the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) received increased submissions from students, many of which related to disputed assessment.¹⁴

11 The *Code of practice, Section 6* requires institutions to have effective systems for the design, monitoring and review of assessment strategies, rigorous implementation policies that promote effective student learning and secure award standards, and accurate recording and communication systems for the transmission of marks. Assessment and moderation must be conducted with equity, probity and transparency, and there should be clear guidance covering the membership and business of examination boards. The amount and timing of assessment must provide a satisfactory measurement of students' achievement of intended learning outcomes, and there must be clear rules for progression, for meeting PSRB requirements, and for eligibility for an award. Institutions should promote students' learning through the provision of suitably detailed, timely feedback and should also aim to make them aware of their educational responsibilities and encourage them to adopt good academic practice.

12 The very great majority of higher education institutions met these obligations, as witnessed by the fact that all save six audit reports contained judgements of confidence in institutions' current and likely future management of academic standards and of learning opportunities. The audit reports indicated judgements of limited confidence (rather than no confidence) for the remaining institutions: in two instances for their management of learning opportunities¹⁵ (for one in a limited area of provision¹⁶) and in five cases for their management of academic standards. For two of the latter, the judgement of limited confidence applied to the management of standards generally;¹⁷ for the remaining three it applied to specific aspects of provision - to taught undergraduate awards in one case,¹⁸ to taught postgraduate awards in another,¹⁹ and to collaborative activity aside from that in a particular collaborative network in the third,²⁰ for which the institution also received a judgement of limited confidence in its management of learning opportunities.

13 QAA audit reports typically make only limited explicit reference to assessment - most obviously in the section covering assessment policies and regulations. Nonetheless, assessment underpins and pervades much of the remainder of Section 2 on institutional management of academic standards, and may well be referred to in other sections of the report and annex. This paper accordingly takes a broad perspective in reviewing

¹⁴ www.oiahe.org.uk/decisions-and-publications/annual-reports.aspx.

¹⁵ School of Oriental and African Studies Report and Annex; Liverpool Hope University Report and Annex.

¹⁶ Liverpool Hope University Report and Annex.

¹⁷ Leeds Metropolitan University Report and Annex; University of Buckingham Report and Annex.

¹⁸ University of Greenwich Report and Annex.

¹⁹ Institute of Cancer Research Report and Annex.

²⁰ Liverpool Hope University Report and Annex.

Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09

assessment together with aspects of the assurance of higher education provision that influence it.

Themes

14 A reading of the audit reports, their features of good practice, and their recommendations for action indicates that the following main themes bearing on assessment warrant further discussion:

- the processes of programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review
- engagement with the Academic Infrastructure
- the adequacy of programme specifications and the identification of intended learning outcomes
- the role of external examiners
- the membership, conduct and reporting of examination boards
- the clarity and consistency of institutional assessment policies and regulations
- the provision of management information relating to students' academic performance, and the use made of such data
- feedback to students on their academic progress
- assessment of students studying on collaborative programmes
- arrangements for the review, progression and assessment of research students.

Programme approval, periodic review and annual monitoring

15 The processes of programme approval (validation), periodic review and annual monitoring provide opportunities for scrutiny and consideration of intended learning outcomes and their linkages and congruence with modes of assessment. Most institutions had robust arrangements, incorporating appropriate forms of externality in their procedures for programme approval and periodic review. There were, however, instances in some reports where improvements could usefully be made.

Programme approval

16 Examples of recommendations relating to programme approval included: the omission of any systematic consideration in the approval documentation of resources to support learning opportunities;²¹ the need to revise the regulations for programme approval to avoid potential conflicts of interest for faculty officers; the need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of faculty and university bodies with oversight of the approval process; and the need to ensure that the approval of new programmes involves robust external scrutiny.²² Another university, with a reflective and careful approach to programme approval, was recommended to review its ways of recording that conditions of approval had been met.²³

17 In another case, where the external adviser's role in programme approval was both developmental and evaluative, the audit team considered there to be a potential conflict of interest and advised the university to ensure appropriate external impartial critical scrutiny of programme proposals.²⁴ In two instances, institutions were advised to review and strengthen procedures for programme closure to ensure registered students were informed and their

²¹ University of Sussex paragraph 55

²² Leeds Metropolitan University paragraphs 21-25.

²³ University of Essex paragraph 55 .

²⁴ University of Chichester paragraph 34.

interests protected through the continuation of modules with appropriate learning opportunities.²⁵ In another case, the audit team advised a university with a four-stage programme approval process incorporating multiple events to review and revise its procedures, and those for the nomination and approval of internal and external panel members.²⁶

Periodic review

18 Most institutions had robust periodic review arrangements. In cases where audit reports contained recommendations these included: to involve external academic contributions, particularly during programme development;²⁷ to provide criteria and procedures for appointing external members to validation and periodic review panels,²⁸ and explicit guidance on their remit and core activities;²⁹ for an institution offering validated programmes to develop its own internal periodic review to assist it in identifying developing strengths and weaknesses;³⁰ to fully differentiate periodic subject review from course approval and from the process for minor modifications to programmes,³¹ and to ensure thorough oversight of programme details during periodic review.³²

19 One institution, with multiple audit processes, was advised to clarify its arrangements for course approval³³ and also to review its audit mechanisms to clarify their purpose and effectiveness, how these link with periodic review, and how the various audit processes make an integrated contribution to the management of academic standards, quality and enhancement.³⁴

20 Other recommendations for improvement included the need for a greater evaluative element synthesising student views in periodic review,³⁵ the need to redesign the format of the programme team's self-evaluation form to align more closely with current definitions of standards and quality,³⁶ and the need to involve learning support staff more directly in periodic reviews.³⁷ In several cases the review cycle had lagged - sometimes because of departmental or school delays in responding to the draft report - and institutions were advised to address this, and ensure that their periodic review cycles remained on track.³⁸

21 The most imperative recommendations addressed more significant failings of periodic review: the need to ensure that it is undertaken at regular intervals with critical and robust contributions from external peers, and that overriding responsibility for the process is determined by a senior university body rather than faculty officers;³⁹ and the need to introduce systematic institutional-level processes for the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision in a case where their absence at the time of the audit was judged to constitute a threat to academic standards.⁴⁰ At another small, specialist postgraduate

²⁵ Goldsmiths College paragraph 40; Coventry University paragraph 75.

²⁶ Southampton Solent University paragraphs 37-54.

²⁷ Roehampton University paragraphs 25 and 52.

²⁸ University of Lincoln paragraph 105; University of Sunderland paragraphs 19 and 26.

²⁹ University of Lincoln paragraphs 106-108.

³⁰ Leeds College of Music paragraphs 78 and 82.

³¹ University of Northampton paragraph 33.

³² Nottingham Trent University paragraphs 69, 70.

³³ Leeds Metropolitan University paragraph 21.

³⁴ Leeds Metropolitan University paragraphs 38,39.

³⁵ University of Sussex paragraph 64.

³⁶ Aston University paragraph 31.

³⁷ University of Durham paragraphs 34 and 69.

³⁸ University of Chichester paragraph 52; University of the West of England paragraph 40.

³⁹ Leeds Metropolitan University paragraphs 33, 35.

⁴⁰ London Business School paragraph 110.

Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09

institution the audit team concluded that programme approval, monitoring and review processes were underdeveloped, putting academic standards at risk, and contributing to a judgement of limited confidence in this aspect of its provision.⁴¹

Annual monitoring

22 There were more recommendations attached to annual monitoring than to other aspects of programme review. In light of the fact that significant issues noted in periodic review had not featured in preceding annual monitoring reports, one institution was advised to strengthen its annual departmental review as a programme review process.⁴² Several audit reports commented on inconsistencies and variability in annual monitoring and its reporting, reinforcing the need for institutional level protocols that set out minimum requirements.⁴³ Some institutions' arrangements for annual monitoring were viewed as unsatisfactory in certain respects: the need for collective scrutiny of annual reports rather than by a single individual;⁴⁴ concern that progressive filtering of information during reporting of annual monitoring to central university bodies may not provide sufficiently detailed information for them to discharge their responsibilities;⁴⁵ and a view that a university's processes for annual monitoring were disproportionately resource-intensive, which meant they were burdensome to staff and in part duplicated other reporting routes.⁴⁶

23 Some institutions devolve responsibility for minor programme changes to departments, schools or similar units without need for external or other internal scrutiny beyond the initiating unit. A significant danger here is repeated incremental shift, with the potential for appreciable changes to programmes accruing between periodic reviews. Several audit reports commented on this, and the need for institutions to have effective monitoring systems in place to avoid such outcomes.⁴⁷ The problem is exacerbated when there is a lack of clarity as to the limits of minor changes or when formal reapproval is required,⁴⁸ when there is no need for external examiner oversight of assessment for electives over several years, or an absence of formal procedures for annual programme monitoring.⁴⁹

Engagement with the Academic Infrastructure

24 The audit reports indicate that the very great majority of institutions engaged effectively with the Academic Infrastructure, with some engagements cited as examples of good practice.⁵⁰ These included the embedding of the Academic Infrastructure within a university's quality processes and its use to guide management of its quality systems.⁵¹ Another university's engagement with revised sections of the *Code of practice* and with the consultation process over aspects of the Academic Infrastructure, as well as its deployment of task and finish groups to consider the implications of specific revisions, were all cited as

⁴¹ Institute of Cancer Research paragraph 35-39.

⁴² Royal College of Art paragraphs 85, 86

⁴³ University of Birmingham paragraph 45; University of Bradford paragraphs 96, 99,102; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts paragraph 77; University of Reading paragraph 44; Goldsmiths College paragraph 46.

⁴⁴ University of Central Lancashire paragraphs 76-78.

⁴⁵ The Queen's University of Belfast paragraph 41.

⁴⁶ University of the West of England, Bristol paragraphs 35, 42,43.

⁴⁷ Southampton Solent University paragraph 61; University of Sunderland paragraph 24; London Business School paragraphs 34-36; Royal College of Art paragraph 48.

⁴⁸ Southampton Solent University paragraph 61; Royal College of Art paragraph 48.

⁴⁹ London Business School paragraph 35.

⁵⁰ Further evidence of institutional practice in relation to the Academic Infrastructure is provided in the *Outcomes* paper *External involvement in quality management* paragraphs 22-26.

⁵¹ University of Chichester paragraph 67.

instances of good practice; as was the university's prompt and effective response to national external initiatives generally.⁵²

25 In another case a university's annual audit of its practices against each section of the *Code of practice* allowed it to consider whether its policy and procedures needed adjustment, and to take stock of revised sections of the *Code of practice* in a structured way. Its consideration of the section of the *Code of practice* on students with disabilities was considered particularly noteworthy for its influence on practice across the university. The audit report identified the university's structured approach to the use of the *Code of practice* in the management of learning opportunities as a feature of good practice.⁵³ Another university's consistent use of gap analysis in its mapping of practices and procedures against the expectations within revisions of the Academic Infrastructure was also cited as good practice.⁵⁴

26 There were many recommendations for improvements and/or extensions of engagement with the Academic Infrastructure. Examples included: the need for levels to be specified for year two and three modules (their absence reflecting the tension between maximising student choice and rigorously specifying the year of study), so that the university was advised to give priority to aligning its provision with the levels of guidance offered in the FHEQ⁵⁵ and to using effective credit level descriptors;⁵⁶ and the need for a university to revise its plans for awards based on credit-bearing short courses and/or accredited prior experiential learning (APEL), so that appropriate attention could be paid to external reference points in determining the name of such awards.⁵⁷ A related issue was one where regulations had allowed students to register for modules bearing insufficient credit to allow them to progress beyond a particular level.⁵⁸ At one specialist institution there was a need for validation panels to assess standards of awards with reference to the FHEQ and to revise the annual programme review process with reference to the revised *Code of practice*, Section 7.⁵⁹

27 At another institution judged to have used the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points effectively in setting and maintaining academic standards there was nonetheless a recommendation to strengthen systems for implementing external subject benchmark statements at programme level, and to develop a more systematic process for responding to changes in external reference points.⁶⁰

28 In a very few cases institutions had failed significantly to engage with the Academic Infrastructure, with serious effects on their academic standards. In some instances these were small, graduate-entry, specialist institutions but in other cases they were larger institutions with a broader subject spread. Along with other recommendations, one institution was advised to review its engagement with the *Code of practice* and other external reference points. The concept of credit based on notional learning hours was poorly understood and the relationship between these did not align with the proposed UK norm. The audit report also concluded that the institution's approach to assessment was underdeveloped, was

⁵² University of Sheffield paragraphs 53-57.

⁵³ University of Northampton paragraph 28.

⁵⁴ University of Portsmouth paragraphs 58 and 80.

⁵⁵ University of East Anglia paragraph 22.

⁵⁶ Loughborough University paragraph 57.

⁵⁷ University of Hertfordshire paragraph 35 .

⁵⁸ Roehampton University paragraph 34, 35.

⁵⁹ Royal College of Art paragraphs 46, 86.

⁶⁰ Nottingham Trent University paragraphs 45.

Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09

insufficiently articulated and publicised, and was putting the academic standards of its taught awards at risk.⁶¹

29 At another specialist institution students on its exchange programme were able to accumulate one-sixth of programme credits from unmoderated programmes at partner institutions assessed only on a pass/fail basis, without any assurance that the academic standards of the partner institutions were comparable with each other or with the expectations of a UK master's-level award. The team judged the lack of oversight of student work at these institutions to constitute a threat to the academic standards of the award, making it essential to ensure independent oversight of all credit derived from summative assessment within collaborative provision which contributed to an award.⁶²

30 Another university used FHEQ terminology for some of its awards that nonetheless failed to meet FHEQ requirements, despite the university's requirement that all its provision be within the FHEQ; the audit report recommended that the university review the nomenclature and status of such awards.⁶³ A judgement of limited confidence in the institution's management of the academic standards of its taught undergraduate awards was an outcome of the audit.

31 In a further case the lack of a strategic, institutional approach to academic standards meant that the institution could not assure itself that standards for its taught postgraduate provision accorded with national expectations. Evidence of critical engagement with external frameworks such as the Academic Infrastructure was lacking at programme approval, and in the minutes of the senate and its committees.⁶⁴

The adequacy of programme specifications and the identification of intended learning outcomes

32 The identification of intended learning outcomes at programme and sub-programme levels is fundamental to any consideration of assessment and its practice within higher education. Accordingly, virtually all of the audited institutions had adopted the principle of intended learning outcomes within their programme specifications and these were judged by audit teams to be at least adequate and in some cases better than adequate.

33 In one case, the documentation was comprehensive enough to be deemed a feature of good practice.⁶⁵ Information included full programme specifications, programme-specific information and curricula with detailed mapping of assessment onto programme learning outcomes; additionally there was detailed mapping of programme curricula and outcomes onto a variety of national and international benchmarks, including the subject benchmark statements, Credit Consortia Level Descriptors,⁶⁶ characteristics identified by the Association of European Conservatoires,⁶⁷ and the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Skills Training Requirements.⁶⁸ Academic regulations were also exceptionally clear.⁶⁹

34 However, rather more examples of omissions or deficiencies in programme specifications, or intended learning outcomes within them, were identified, with ensuing

⁶¹ Institute of Cancer Research paragraphs 13, 31, 43, 45, 47, 48, 54, 105.

⁶² London Business School paragraph 104.

⁶³ University of Greenwich paragraph 53.

⁶⁴ University of Buckingham paragraph 26, 31, 33, 35, 48, 63.

⁶⁵ Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance paragraph 27.

⁶⁶ www.nicats.ac.uk/mainindex.html.

⁶⁷ www.aecinfo.org.

⁶⁸ www.ahrc.ac.uk/Pages/default.aspx.

⁶⁹ Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance paragraph 27.

recommendations. These included the need, as a matter of urgency, to complete programme specifications that incorporate suitably comprehensive learning outcomes for all programmes⁷⁰ and, for another institution, the need to clarify links between programme outcomes and those given as threshold and focal outcomes in subject benchmark statements. As things stood, it was unclear how these sets of outcomes were linked to each other, to module learning outcomes, to the assignment criteria specified in the assignment briefs, or to the college/validating university's generic descriptors.⁷¹ There was also a need to provide clearer, more detailed assessment criteria within assignment briefs.⁷²

35 A finding that occurred more than once was that some programme specifications contained only generic learning outcomes and assessment criteria, so that subject-specific information was lacking and it was frequently not possible to determine from the programme specification any subject-specific assessment strategy.⁷³ In some cases learning outcomes were undifferentiated by level.⁷⁴ In another case the programme specifications made broad and imprecise connections between assessment methods and programme outcomes, and a similar situation was noted for unit specifications, so that it was unclear that all programme outcomes were assessed. There was thus a need for programme learning outcomes to be reflected in the intended learning outcomes of the constituent units, and for unit specifications to indicate how their intended learning outcomes were to be assessed.⁷⁵

36 The dual use in some institutions of programme specifications for both initial programme validation and as a continuing source of information for students places an additional obligation on those institutions to ensure that they continue to be current and incorporate appropriate levels of detail at programme and unit levels, including that for assessment. Programme specifications also need to be readily available to students. Although generally the case, this was not universal.⁷⁶ At another institution, major and minor module changes that were made following validation did not require any articulation of the relationship between module and programme objectives to ensure that the former continue to contribute to the latter.⁷⁷

The role of external examiners

37 Most reports indicated the crucial role played by external examiners in calibrating, monitoring and moderating standards through assessment.⁷⁸ Features of good practice included their rigorous appointment and training;⁷⁹ the appointing process;⁸⁰ the compilation of a record to avoid reciprocity;⁸¹ the comprehensive nature and quality of advice provided to external examiners;⁸² the use of case studies to highlight issues for external examiner induction;⁸³ the provision of an annual workshop for staff interested in becoming external examiners elsewhere;⁸⁴ and the effective operation and management of the external

⁷⁰ School of Oriental and African Studies paragraphs 69-71.

⁷¹ Leeds College of Music paragraph 50.

⁷² Leeds College of Music paragraph 55.

⁷³ University of Leeds paragraph 47; Leeds College of Music paragraph 50

⁷⁴ Leeds College of Music paragraph 54 .

⁷⁵ University of Bristol paragraphs 27, 28.

⁷⁶ University of Lincoln paragraphs 41-43

⁷⁷ Leeds Trinity and All Saints paragraph 17.

⁷⁸ Further evidence of institutional practice in relation to the appointment and use of external examiners is provided in the *Outcomes* paper *External involvement in quality management* paragraphs 30-42.

⁷⁹ Royal Veterinary College paragraph 55.

⁸⁰ Southampton Solent University paragraph 90.

⁸¹ School of Pharmacy paragraph 59.

⁸² University College London paragraph 54; Open University paragraph 47.

⁸³ University of Portsmouth paragraph 52.

⁸⁴ University of Brighton paragraph 46.

Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09

examiner system⁸⁵ and its use.⁸⁶ Effective procedures for the logging and institutional consideration of issues raised by external examiners, including the compilation of summary overview reports, were also highlighted in reports,⁸⁷ together with the integration of external examiners within the university's overall quality assurance system.⁸⁸

38 Given their centrality for standards, there were also a significant number of recommendations for the more effective deployment of external examiners. These included: the need to ensure that all external examiners have experience of university teaching;⁸⁹ the need for timely appointment;⁹⁰ the provision of standard information to all external examiners;⁹¹ and more comprehensive and effective induction.⁹² The need for greater involvement by external examiners in assessment was noted in a few cases: for external examiners from both subjects to assess joint honours programmes;⁹³ and for external examiners to be involved in determining standards for programmes run by external partners.⁹⁴

39 Several reports made recommendations to augment the information provided by external examiners, and to promote a more strategic institutional approach to standards and assessment through more thorough reflection on issues and themes raised in examiners' reports. They included a revised template for external examiner reports;⁹⁵ senior committee involvement of externals;⁹⁶ more effective consideration of external examiners' reports by the institution⁹⁷ including the provision of overview reports;⁹⁸ and the recording of outcomes and action taken.⁹⁹

40 Two reports cautioned against the use of external examiners beyond their examining remit, whether because to do so unacceptably restricted the range of external scrutiny for programme proposals¹⁰⁰ or to avoid potential conflicts of interest for external examiners when serving on periodic review panels.¹⁰¹

The membership, conduct and reporting of examination boards

41 Reflecting their adoption of modular or course-unit frameworks, many institutions operate a two-tier structure for assessment boards: those concerned with the assessment of students on individual units or modules, and those reviewing overall student performance on programmes and making recommendations on progression and academic awards. Some institutions may have a third board interposed between these to deal with particular programme stages. Various terms are used to differentiate these, and while internal and

⁸⁵ University of Lincoln paragraph 67.

⁸⁶ University of Chichester paragraph 59.

⁸⁷ Leeds Trinity and All Saints paragraph 13; University of Sheffield paragraph 30.

⁸⁸ University of Sheffield paragraph 34.

⁸⁹ School of Oriental and African Studies paragraph 86.

⁹⁰ Goldsmiths College paragraph 26.

⁹¹ University of East Anglia paragraph 10.

⁹² Royal College of Art paragraph 40; University of Buckingham paragraph 43.

⁹³ School of Oriental and African Studies paragraph 16.

⁹⁴ London Business School paragraph 46.

⁹⁵ University of Falmouth paragraph 55; University of Loughborough paragraph 88; University of Cambridge paragraph 32.

⁹⁶ Royal Agricultural College paragraph 24.

⁹⁷ London Business School paragraph 52; Anglia Ruskin University paragraph 136; Royal College of Art paragraph 44; Institute for Cancer Research paragraph 43.

⁹⁸ University of Buckingham paragraph 43.

⁹⁹ Institute for Cancer Research paragraph 43.

¹⁰⁰ Lancaster University paragraph 25.

¹⁰¹ Royal College of Music paragraph 36.

external examiners are usually (although the latter not invariably) represented on all types of board, quoracy requirements, chairing and reporting arrangements may be very different.

42 The effective remit, conduct and reporting of examination boards provided several instances of good practice. They include: the clear and comprehensive specification, constitution, remit, and operating procedures for examination boards, with mechanisms to ensure consistent implementation and institutional oversight,¹⁰² and the annual meeting of staff involved in examination boards along with the associated dissemination strategy which provides an institutional enhancement mechanism for assessment.¹⁰³

43 There were also recommendations for action. These included: a review of quoracy requirements for internal progression boards to reflect appropriate breadth of academic input;¹⁰⁴ the need to ensure satisfactory attendance by internal examiners at examination boards;¹⁰⁵ and the need to ensure that university policy on external examiner membership of assessment boards be implemented and that externals be fully involved in both assessment committees and examination boards.¹⁰⁶ In one instance, where current practice was more robust than were the university's academic regulations, the report recommended that the regulations should be revised to secure the independence of chairs of boards of examiners.¹⁰⁷ Another audit report recommended that procedures for considering mitigating circumstances should be reviewed to ensure student confidentiality and parity of treatment.¹⁰⁸

44 At a specialist college offering awards from two validating universities, there were discrepancies between the external examiner membership of college boards and those specified by the relevant validating university, and there were no college-authored overarching assessment regulations although these were a requirement of the validating university. The audit report recommended that the college comply with university regulations on both counts.¹⁰⁹ At another specialist institution, the College Examination Committee, lacking external membership, could override the assessment recommendations of Subject Examination Boards that included external examiners. The college was advised to reconsider its use of external examiners, particularly their lack of input to the College Examination Committee.¹¹⁰ At a third specialist institution there was a recommendation for more complete and thorough minuting of examination board decisions taken with regard to special circumstances, accreditation of prior experiential learning, and the exercise of discretion.¹¹¹

45 Several reports noted variability in both assessment procedures and practice by boards. They included variability in attendance at examination boards with potential implications for appropriate internal representation and external scrutiny;¹¹² local interpretation of academic regulations with implications for resit eligibility and the introduction of an additional pass band into the degree scheme for some programmes;¹¹³ and significant variation in and sometimes inappropriate use of condonation in the exercise of discretion.¹¹⁴

¹⁰² University College London paragraph 96.

¹⁰³ Aston University paragraph 52.

¹⁰⁴ Ravensbourne College of Design & Communication paragraph 55.

¹⁰⁵ Institute of Cancer Research paragraph 53.

¹⁰⁶ University of Bradford paragraph 63; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts paragraphs 31-35, 37-38.

¹⁰⁷ Leeds Metropolitan University paragraph 49.

¹⁰⁸ Institute of Cancer Research paragraph 51.

¹⁰⁹ Leeds College of Music paragraphs 15, 17 and 58, 59.

¹¹⁰ Royal Agricultural College paragraph 24.

¹¹¹ Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts paragraph 36.

¹¹² University of East Anglia paragraph 46.

¹¹³ Roehampton University paragraph 32.

¹¹⁴ Loughborough University paragraphs 62-64.

Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09

In all cases, the universities were advised to review their policies and arrangements against the *Code of practice*.

46 In another instance, the university was advised to investigate, as soon as practicable, the use of discretion by examination boards in 2008-09 including making it the subject of a report from the University Chief Examiner.¹¹⁵

The clarity and consistency of institutional assessment policies and regulations

47 Features of good practice in this area included the wide availability, clarity and comprehensiveness of assessment criteria;¹¹⁶ the clarity of definition and consistency of application of the online submission of coursework procedure;¹¹⁷ and the distinctive marking scale for first-year work, designed to enhance the quality of feedback and promote retention and progression.¹¹⁸ Several institutions were cited as exemplars of good practice for their regulatory approach to plagiarism combined with the associated provision of clear, detailed and helpful guidance to students on how to avoid this.¹¹⁹

48 Most universities and colleges had institution-wide assessment regulations, although a limited number allowed a degree of variability to reflect distinct discipline cultures and to promote local ownership. This, together with insufficiently robust procedures, led to some inconsistencies and variations of practice that audit reports recommended be rectified. They included: the need to develop a set of comprehensive assessment regulations for the classification of validated awards and progression from these; the consideration of borderline cases; the application of compensation and the use of different pass marks for different programmes;¹²⁰ the need to address inconsistencies in resit policies and other regulatory issues;¹²¹ and the need to harmonise attendance requirements for different programmes that impact on resit entitlement.¹²² Other recommendations included the need to review and revise assessment procedures to ensure greater consistency and accuracy in the recording and reporting of marks;¹²³ consistency in granting coursework extensions; and developing a more clearly defined and transparent mechanism for establishing boundaries for the moderation of marks.¹²⁴

49 At one institution, the audit report identified a need to achieve institutional coherence on regulatory and academic processes covering penalties for late submission and failing to abide by word limits, as well as clarifying the classification of borderline candidates and mark capping;¹²⁵ and when this is achieved to ensure full and timely departmental engagement and alignment.¹²⁶ At a collegiate university there was a need to review the differential impact on progression of distinct college approaches to academic discipline,¹²⁷ and at another the need to clearly state in detail any additional criteria required for the award

¹¹⁵ University of Durham paragraphs 54-56.

¹¹⁶ Leeds Trinity and All Saints College paragraph 28.

¹¹⁷ University of Essex paragraph 41.

¹¹⁸ University of Wolverhampton paragraph 36.

¹¹⁹ University of East Anglia paragraph 43; University of Essex paragraph 42; Leeds Metropolitan University paragraph 51; University of Leicester paragraph 31.

¹²⁰ Leeds College of Music paragraphs 59 and 65.

¹²¹ Royal Veterinary College paragraph 76.

¹²² Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance paragraphs 64, 67

¹²³ Southampton Solent University paragraph 120.

¹²⁴ University of Birmingham paragraph 60.

¹²⁵ University College London paragraphs 84, 98, 203.

¹²⁶ University College London paragraphs 84, 99, 163, 174, 206.

¹²⁷ University of Oxford paragraph 62.

of credit.¹²⁸ Other audit recommendations addressed the need for a consistent assessment framework for joint honours programmes and full external examiner involvement in their assessment;¹²⁹ the need to revise generic grading criteria so they align with university grading and marking scales and to develop these further to differentiate between levels;¹³⁰ and a need for the university to review its appeals procedure and ensure that all key data, discussion and decisions are reliably recorded.¹³¹

50 A small number of reports made reference to problematic aspects of particular assessment schemes: at a small specialist institution with eight first degree programmes, the audit report noted wide variations in the proportion of first class degrees awarded. Given that possible reasons for this variation had not been explored, the team advised the institution to consider a survey of award profiles of similar degrees in comparator institutions and to undertake, with its degree awarding partner, a review of its degree classification profile and to reflect more proactively on issues arising from assessment at institutional level.¹³²

51 At a university with two assessment schemes for taught postgraduate programmes, the audit team identified significant variability in the application of one of the schemes, with a lack of consistency in departmental expectations of students and, in some cases, the possibility of their obtaining the award without achieving all programme-level learning objectives. The audit report recommended the university to review its assessment regulations for taught postgraduate programmes to ensure that the required learning outcomes were met for all awards.¹³³

52 At another university the introduction of a new degree classification framework offered award boards three alternative profiling models for assessing each student, but a significant number were nonetheless assessed outside the formally agreed framework. This, together with a lack of any follow-up action by the relevant senior university committee with oversight responsibility other than to continue monitoring degree classification, resulted in a recommendation that the university ensure that its regulatory framework was applied consistently, and that judgements did not undermine the university's assurance of the standards of its taught undergraduate awards.¹³⁴

The provision and use of management information relating to students' academic performance

53 There were several examples of good practice in the provision of management information systems. These are indicative of the progress being made by institutions to use data to inform their management of standards and quality. For example, one institution had developed a bespoke student record system (tRACker) that enabled the production of timely management information, including collation of informative module and cohort data, assessment data for examination boards, and progression and award summaries for Academic Board.¹³⁵ At another institution the production, analysis and use of statistical management information were judged to be strengths, especially in the drive for consistency and explanation of justified inconsistency. Schools and programmes were provided with reliable, accessible data and accompanying analyses to support planning, annual monitoring and periodic review. Student tracking had been improved, with intelligent use of

¹²⁸ University of Bristol paragraph 57.

¹²⁹ Goldsmiths College paragraph 33.

¹³⁰ University of Hertfordshire paragraph 45.

¹³¹ University of Buckingham paragraph 56.

¹³² Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts paragraphs 53-55 .

¹³³ University of Leicester paragraph 30.

¹³⁴ University of Greenwich paragraphs 63-68 .

¹³⁵ Royal Agricultural College paragraphs 46, 57, 58.

Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09

benchmarking as a management tool. At institutional level, management information enabled the university to monitor its strategic intentions through its key performance indicators.¹³⁶

54 The audit report indicated that a small specialist institution had developed its management information system considerably and was able to analyse data effectively at programme and institutional levels for managing academic standards and quality.¹³⁷ At another university, the audit team found the SAMIS student records system provided the information required for undergraduate programmes promptly, providing substantial benefits of time-saving for academic staff and consistency of statistical reporting.¹³⁸

55 Another university had further developed its Progression Analysis Tool (PAT) for analysing trends in student progression to include all university students (regardless of mode of study or campus) and had simplified the user interface so that staff could interrogate the data without the need for specialist training or detailed knowledge of the system.¹³⁹

56 Several other higher education institutions were cited as exemplars of good practice for their use of management data and, in one case, plans for future use. One university planned to develop its data set beyond that required for programme review to include standardised reports on broader performance indicators which would inform the implementation of institutional strategies. The audit report endorsed the university's intention to monitor the effectiveness of developments and to share best practice across schools in the compilation of programme annual review reports.¹⁴⁰

57 Another instance was a university's use of statistical data, including the provision of risk alerts, to provide an independent check on programme performance and enhance the effectiveness of annual programme monitoring.¹⁴¹ Another university had recently introduced educational balance sheets, providing qualitative and quantitative data on the academic and financial health of different aspects of educational provision, and covering admissions, National Student Survey (NSS) data and their implications, and undergraduate progression. The balance sheets also contributed to the development of the institutional strategic plan.¹⁴²

58 Another institution made use of a student performance monitoring group, which monitored student entry and performance data across the university, providing reports on trends to faculties, schools and other university committees. This group was effective in monitoring, and reporting on, a range of statistical indicators to assist in university oversight of academic standards.¹⁴³ In addition to programme management, other audit reports emphasise the value of student data for developing institutional strategies and achieving strategic goals.¹⁴⁴

59 There were also many recommendations for further action over the provision and use of management information systems. They included: the need to develop further systems for monitoring management information for admissions, progression, completion

¹³⁶ University of Salford paragraph 44.

¹³⁷ Rose Bruford College paragraph 82.

¹³⁸ University of Bath paragraphs 36, 37, 85, 89.

¹³⁹ University of Kent paragraph 50.

¹⁴⁰ Roehampton University paragraph 49.

¹⁴¹ University of Exeter paragraph 79.

¹⁴² City University paragraph 47.

¹⁴³ University of Hertfordshire paragraph 47.

¹⁴⁴ London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine paragraph 38; University of Cambridge paragraph 64; University of Salford paragraph 42; City University paragraph 51; Open University paragraph 77.

and achievement at all levels and to make effective use of the resulting data;¹⁴⁵ the need to make more effective use of existing management information in monitoring and review procedures;¹⁴⁶ and the need to continue to integrate the analysis of critical statistics more fully into key processes for managing academic quality and standards.¹⁴⁷ Another large university was advised to ensure the robust and consistent use of appropriate data in the periodic review process,¹⁴⁸ while a specialist institute was advised of the need to undertake, with its validating university, a review of the degree classification profile across its undergraduate programmes relative to national comparators, and to reflect more proactively on the issues arising from assessment at an institutional level.¹⁴⁹

60 All kinds of higher education institution are represented among those with recommendations for the more effective compilation and use of student data for managing academic standards and learning opportunities. This points to a significant issue - or perhaps a series of related issues - across the sector. Some audit reports give the impression that institutions are struggling with outmoded or otherwise inappropriate student record systems with a significant lack of functionality. Even when robust IT systems are in place, institutions may not always make fully effective use of them because of inappropriate committee remit or failure to interrogate the data as fully as they might. This appears to be a central, institutional-level issue and not something that can be addressed locally by departments or schools. Given growth in student numbers, the greater regulatory demands on institutions, and the increasingly competitive environment within the sector, this may well become a more pressing issue for some institutions, at least in the short term.

Feedback to students on their academic progress

61 Feedback on assessment, both formative and summative, is central to ensuring that assessment provides students with an opportunity to learn from completed assessment and therefore enable them to improve future work. The debate, stimulated in particular by the National Student Survey (NSS) results, focuses on timing and timeliness, the latter being critical if students are to have sufficient time to reflect on, and make use of, the feedback received. Most institutions recognised and acknowledged the importance of providing regular, prompt and informative feedback to students on their assessed work. Some had formalised minimum standards into their academic regulations or into a statement of student entitlement, albeit in some cases with qualifiers such as 'normally' or 'whenever possible.' One institution provided an instance of good practice in its focus on assessment practices to support student learning. This was demonstrated by prioritising these in its Assessment, Learning and Teaching Strategy, and in setting a three-week limit for providing feedback - a period significantly shorter than that provided for in its academic regulations.¹⁵⁰

62 However, consistent with NSS findings, many other audit reports remarked on student concerns that their entitlements concerning feedback were not always achieved in practice. Comments to this effect featured in some student written submissions,¹⁵¹ or were

¹⁴⁵ School of Oriental and African Studies paragraphs 72-75; Institute of Cancer Research paragraph 56; Royal Veterinary College paragraphs 86,103; Middlesex University paragraph 23; University of Southampton paragraph 46.

¹⁴⁶ Royal Academy of Music paragraphs 449 and 50.

¹⁴⁷ University of Lincoln paragraph 85; University of Lancaster paragraph 45.

¹⁴⁸ Leeds Metropolitan University paragraphs 34.

¹⁴⁹ Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts paragraphs 55, 59.

¹⁵⁰ Leeds Metropolitan University paragraph 50.

¹⁵¹ For example, The Queen's University Belfast paragraphs 80, 81.

Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09

voiced by student panel members at meetings with auditors,¹⁵² or sometimes both. In some instances staff panel members reinforced the reality of student concerns.¹⁵³

63 Many recommendations in this area were variations on a theme. Examples included: the need to address fully students' long-standing concerns about the timeliness and effectiveness of feedback;¹⁵⁴ the need for the institution to consider carefully the evidence for the return of student work to ensure agreed policy is followed, given student concerns over this and the lack of any systematic monitoring to identify strengths or potential weaknesses in the assessment process;¹⁵⁵ the need to address variability in target assessment turnaround times and assessment schedules by reviewing the balance between central policy and local practice by schools and faculties;¹⁵⁶ the need to ensure that university policies on feedback and guidance contained in the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook are consistently applied;¹⁵⁷ and the need for the university to secure consistency in the provision of assessment criteria at module level to ensure equity of treatment of students.¹⁵⁸

64 Other issues of concern included the need for clarity and standardisation of information about assessment tasks, deadlines and feedback in multiple publications for students,¹⁵⁹ and the need, in view of student concerns, to expedite a decision on moving to anonymous marking of coursework.¹⁶⁰ In one institution the report indicated that while considerable efforts had been made to improve feedback mechanisms, including providing training for part-time staff and visiting lecturers, a greater impact could have been achieved had steps been taken in a more timely manner.¹⁶¹

65 At one university the student written submission indicated student confusion over which double marking scheme was being used, and suggested that the university be 'more explicit about learning outcomes, publishing and discussing marking criteria and relating subsequent feedback to it, always giving feedback that offers clear suggestions for improvement and fully explaining the systems of moderation or double-marking in operation in each School'. The audit report suggested that this concern reflected in part a lack of institutional guidance and recommended that the university provide such guidance on the information about assessment to be made available to students.¹⁶² At the same institution the audit report identified good practice in the School of Biology's provision of an assessment calendar, but also concluded that there was no formal institutional mechanism for monitoring assessment load, with a particular risk of disadvantaging joint honours students with unacceptable bunching of assessment deadlines.¹⁶³ Moreover, practice for granting extensions for coursework submissions varied across schools, again with potential inequities for students.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵² For example, Nottingham Trent University paragraph 50; University of Portsmouth paragraph 69; Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance paragraph 68.

¹⁵³ University of Wolverhampton paragraph 41.

¹⁵⁴ City University paragraph 57.

¹⁵⁵ Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance paragraphs 68, 69.

¹⁵⁶ University of Brighton paragraphs 68, 77, 90; Queen's University Belfast paragraphs 81, 111, 211; University of Portsmouth paragraph 69.

¹⁵⁷ Nottingham Trent University paragraphs 50, 51, 52.

¹⁵⁸ University of Wolverhampton paragraph 41.

¹⁵⁹ Central School of Speech and Drama paragraphs 46, 50, 57.

¹⁶⁰ Leeds Trinity and All Saints paragraph 30.

¹⁶¹ Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts paragraphs 85-87.

¹⁶² University of East Anglia paragraph 40.

¹⁶³ University of East Anglia paragraph 41.

¹⁶⁴ University of East Anglia paragraph 42.

Collaborative provision

66 Institutions with extensive collaborative provision were subject to separate audits of their collaborative activities; the following section is based upon information on the remainder contained in the main Institutional Audit reports. Where relevant details are given, they show that in the great majority of cases external examiners for collaborative activity are appointed using the same criteria and processes as those for home campus programmes, and are generally offered the same support in induction, training and access to institutional networks for external examiners.¹⁶⁵ Some universities had redesigned their external examiners' report form to highlight comments on collaborative activity,¹⁶⁶ resulting, in at least one case, in 'qualitative improvements in external examiner reports relating to collaborative provision'.¹⁶⁷

67 Several features of good practice were noted in the reports. Some related to particular programmes viewed as exemplars,¹⁶⁸ or to the coordinating body within the university.¹⁶⁹ In another instance the rigorous management of assessment of students taking the foreign language programme within collaborative provision was cited as an example of good practice,¹⁷⁰ while elsewhere overseas partner staff were engaged in staff development on the university campus, and learning and other resources for students had improved.¹⁷¹

68 There were also numerous recommendations for institutions. In two cases external advisers involved in programme approval had shortly afterwards become external examiners for the programme, potentially compromising the impartiality of assessment.¹⁷² In light of adverse comments from examiners, one institution's arrangements for briefing external examiners for collaborative provision were judged not to align sufficiently with the *Code of practice*.¹⁷³ In another case, external examiners without any UK higher education experience had been appointed by the university on the nomination of overseas partner institutions, leading the audit team to query their experience and authority to pronounce on academic standards in relation to UK norms.¹⁷⁴ By contrast, another institution required its external examiners for collaborative provision to have experience of UK higher education,¹⁷⁵ another required them to have experience of collaborative activity,¹⁷⁶ and another required them to visit overseas partners biennially.¹⁷⁷

69 One institution offered a dual award with a prestigious overseas partner but with asymmetric assessment: there were different marking frameworks, no external involvement

¹⁶⁵ Aston University paragraph 136; Keele University paragraph 161; Royal Veterinary College paragraphs 176, 179, 180; School of Oriental and African Studies paragraph 173; Southampton Solent University paragraph 244; University of Bath paragraph 153; University of Hertfordshire paragraph 149; University of Leeds paragraph 215; University of Salford paragraph 99; University of Sheffield paragraph 143 .

¹⁶⁶ Aston University paragraph 136; University of Salford paragraph 99; University of Sheffield paragraphs 143, 144.

¹⁶⁷ University of Wolverhampton paragraph 138.

¹⁶⁸ University of Winchester paragraph 99; University of Warwick paragraph 159; University of York paragraph 169.

¹⁶⁹ University of Brighton paragraph 168; University of East Anglia paragraph 138.

¹⁷⁰ London Business School paragraph 108.

¹⁷¹ Loughborough University paragraph 171.

¹⁷² Keele University paragraph 161; University of Bath paragraph 153.

¹⁷³ Goldsmiths College paragraph 110.

¹⁷⁴ Lancaster University paragraphs 87, 88.

¹⁷⁵ University of Hertfordshire paragraph 149.

¹⁷⁶ Southampton Solent University paragraph 244.

¹⁷⁷ University of Wolverhampton paragraph 138.

Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09

in the partner's assessment, and the UK externals simply received the marks without any modifying input.¹⁷⁸ Another of the institution's programmes allowed students involved in its international partnership scheme to accumulate up to one-sixth of programme credits on an ungraded pass/fail basis without any UK internal moderation or external involvement.¹⁷⁹ Another university's Memorandum of Agreement governing arrangements for a small-intake dual award met neither its own code of practice, nor the precepts of the QAA *Code of practice, Section 2*. The audit report accordingly included a recommendation that the university review its arrangements for the dual award so that it engages fully with the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2*.¹⁸⁰

70 There were also some narrower concerns about aspects of assessment. One university did not require the same assessment tasks for home and partner provision, allowing partners to develop their own. While university staff and external examiners moderated examination papers, there was no moderation of assessed coursework unless a risk assessment warranted it. It was unclear to the audit team how moderation would be done when the programme was taught in a foreign language.¹⁸¹ At another university, online group discussion without any security measures to ensure participants' identity contributed significantly to the summative assessment of some modules. The university was recommended to introduce such measures.¹⁸²

71 For one university, the constraints imposed by its charter together with the nature of existing partnerships and the current memoranda of agreement posed particular challenges should any collaborative arrangements in a subject be terminated; in view of the level of risk the audit report recommended that the university review the memoranda and current arrangements, including its own structures, for managing collaborative provision in that subject.¹⁸³

72 At a specialist institution earlier decisions about the accreditation of prior learning, including prior experiential learning, affecting up to one-third of students on one programme, were not fed through to examination boards which meant that external examiners did not have all the relevant information to review the complete student cohort.¹⁸⁴ Another institution was recommended to review its memorandum of understanding with an overseas university in light of the risks involved in the reuse of academic credit in a collaboration not involving academic progression.¹⁸⁵ Another university, with generally robust procedures, was advised to expedite changes to address the potentially serious threat to academic standards resulting from one of its component institutes issuing awards in its own name based on a different quality assurance framework from that of the university generally.¹⁸⁶

73 At one institution examination timings for some collaborative distance-learning programmes required separate sub-boards, with different visiting examiners to those for the corresponding full-time programmes, so that external monitoring of equivalent standards for the two study modes could be compromised. The audit team suggested that arrangements would be strengthened by increasing the proportion of visiting examiners appointed to both boards.¹⁸⁷ In another case, the audit report expressed concern about variation in the timing

¹⁷⁸ London Business School paragraphs 97-99.

¹⁷⁹ London Business School paragraphs 100-104.

¹⁸⁰ University of Leicester paragraph 80.

¹⁸¹ University of Hertfordshire paragraphs 143, 144.

¹⁸² University of Liverpool paragraph 138 .

¹⁸³ Queens University Belfast, paragraphs 182-184.

¹⁸⁴ Royal Agricultural College paragraph 110.

¹⁸⁵ Leeds Trinity and All Saints College paragraph 74.

¹⁸⁶ University of Cambridge paragraphs 145-150.

¹⁸⁷ School of Oriental and African Studies paragraph 173.

and quality of feedback provided to students on collaborative programmes, and the absence of standard penalties for late or non-submission of student work, with each partner allowed to have its own system.¹⁸⁸

74 Other more general issues with implications for assessment included: the timing, currency, level of detail, and effectiveness of annual monitoring procedures;¹⁸⁹ and the general robustness of quality assurance arrangements overall for collaborative provision.¹⁹⁰ Others concerned the essential need for legally binding arrangements before students were recruited,¹⁹¹ confusion over transcript and certificate details,¹⁹² and the need for these to record the place of study.¹⁹³

Postgraduate research programmes

75 The audit reports make clear that very many institutions had recently revised, or were in the process of revising, their arrangements for supervising, reviewing and examining research students. For many the catalyst had been QAA's 2005-06 review of research degree programmes and its findings.

76 Information on review and progression arrangements was limited, but review panels included members independent of the supervisory team. A few reports noted internal variation in the arrangements for, and timing of, progress reviews; in these cases audit reports generally recommended that institutions move towards a common, university-wide arrangement¹⁹⁴ with more, rather than fewer, independent panel members.¹⁹⁵

77 In every institutional report where relevant information was provided on assessment it was standard practice to have at least two examiners, one of whom must be external to the institution; when candidates were members of the institution's academic staff, the appointment of two externals was normal.¹⁹⁶ The common procedure was for each examiner to write an independent report before the viva, and for them to write a joint report following it. In the great majority of institutions, regulations precluded the supervisor(s) serving as examiner, but in at least one case this was still permitted, although not common.¹⁹⁷ The audit team recommended that regulations be amended to conform with the *Code of practice, Section 1*. In another case the supervisor, while not an examiner, could participate in the viva, but not in any evaluative discussion. Perhaps not surprisingly, the purpose of this arrangement was unclear to the audit team, and to ensure transparency and greater security

¹⁸⁸ City University paragraph 99.

¹⁸⁹ Roehampton University paragraph 112; Royal Veterinary College paragraphs 175, 182; Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance paragraph 109; University College for the Creative Arts paragraph 145; University of Chichester paragraphs 147, 148; University of East Anglia paragraph 133

¹⁹⁰ University of the West of England paragraphs 103-127; University of Buckingham paragraphs 100-105; Institute of Cancer Research paragraph 105; London Business School paragraphs 96-110; Loughborough University paragraphs 159-170.

¹⁹¹ Loughborough University paragraph 165.

¹⁹² Goldsmiths College paragraph 111.

¹⁹³ London Business School paragraph 100; University of Buckingham paragraph 102.

¹⁹⁴ University of Bath paragraph 169; University of Bradford paragraph 204; University of Southampton paragraph 123.

¹⁹⁵ University of Durham paragraph 153.

¹⁹⁶ For example: De Montfort University paragraph 217; Keele University paragraph 199; Lancaster University paragraph 103; Roehampton University paragraph 123; University of Cambridge paragraph 163; University of Essex paragraph 131; University of Greenwich paragraph 152; University of Leicester paragraph 93; University of Lincoln paragraph 212; University of Reading paragraph 196; University of Salford paragraph 124; University of Wolverhampton paragraph 169.

¹⁹⁷ De Montfort University paragraph 218.

Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09

for assessment, they encouraged the university to provide clearer guidance on supervisor participation in the viva.¹⁹⁸

78 Many institutions had introduced an independent chair for the viva examination or, as an alternative, made arrangements to audio-record the viva.¹⁹⁹ However, a few institutions had chosen not to make an independent chair a requirement, but to allow it as an optional arrangement if considered appropriate.²⁰⁰ Some reports noted that institutions had introduced explicit arrangements to brief and prepare students for the viva including, in some cases, a mock viva held shortly before the formal examination.²⁰¹

79 With one exception relating to institutional oversight,²⁰² the reports revealed an impressive consistency in institutions' approach to the supervision, monitoring and assessment of research students.

Trends in assessment

80 Comparison of the findings on assessment from these audit reports with those summarised in the corresponding Series 1 and Series 2 *Outcomes* papers reveals several developments over the period. Some of these represent incremental changes, others indicate more significant shifts. The present reports indicate most institutions' detailed familiarity with the Academic Infrastructure - in particular the FHEQ and relevant sections of the *Code of practice* - and their application to the design of programme specifications containing intended learning outcomes and attendant assessment. During earlier audit cycles the detailed production of programme specifications was still a work in progress, but the present reports provide evidence of clear institutional recognition of their relevance. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to conclude, at least for the purposes of assessment, that the Academic Infrastructure is now well established within UK higher education as the foundation and framework for programme design.

81 One reflection of this is the clear primacy of institutional assessment policies and regulations over local - faculty, school or department - ones. Both earlier series commented on variability of assessment regimes and classification frameworks within institutions, and the sometimes extensive use of discretion by examining boards. While not entirely absent, these are much less prominent themes in the current audit reports.

82 In parallel with these assessment changes, many institutions have also revised the composition, remits and reporting arrangements for their examining boards to reflect greater transparency and institutional accountability. Besides the *Code of practice*, other stimuli promoting such changes include the HEFCE expectation that institutions would share external examiner reports with student representatives,²⁰³ the resource and reputational implications of student progression and achievement data, NSS outcomes, and the growing influence of league tables. The audit reports reveal concerns with aspects of some individual institutional arrangements - for example quoracy, externality, reporting, and variation in

¹⁹⁸ Roehampton University paragraph 124.

¹⁹⁹ Keele University paragraph 200; University of Lancaster paragraph 103; Open University paragraph 163; Roehampton University paragraph 123; University of Brighton paragraph Brighton 186; University of Greenwich paragraph 152; University of Lincoln paragraph 212; University of Salford paragraph 124; University of Surrey paragraph 244; University of the West of England paragraph 134; University of Wolverhampton paragraph 169.

²⁰⁰ University of Kent paragraph 128; University of Leicester paragraph 93; University of Southampton paragraph 130; University of Warwick paragraph 190.

²⁰¹ Lancaster University paragraph 103; University of Exeter paragraph 237 ; University of Portsmouth paragraph 174; University of Wolverhampton paragraph 169.

²⁰² University of Buckingham paragraphs 110-117.

²⁰³ www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2006/06_45.

assessment, extensions, mitigating circumstances and resit entitlements, but they also indicate that most institutions have robust examination procedures.

83 External examiners' reports are typically considered during, or in addition to, annual monitoring. Many institutions have robust annual processes, but there are examples in the reports where significant improvements in monitoring need to be effected in particular areas. Initial programme approval and periodic review, on the other hand, were found to be generally robust.

84 Improved IT systems offer the prospect of more detailed and timelier data on student progression and achievement for consideration by examination boards and others. However, it was clear from the reports that some institutions' systems did not have the capacity to provide this information, and in other cases, even when it was available, only very limited use was made of it. Despite technical advances and greater affordability, in this respect institutions appear to have made little progress since the last audit cycle.

85 Another aspect where, with one exception, progress has been slow was in providing feedback on assessment to students. Some institutions had introduced policies or statements of entitlement for students, setting out minimum expectations for feedback. However, reports indicate that monitoring and implementation remain problematic for some institutions. A positive feature in some reports was of initiatives to educate students in good scholarly practice with regard to referencing, citation and so on, which they appreciated. The impression gained is that awareness of plagiarism and the need for regulations, policies and educational initiatives to counter it are much more at the forefront of institutional thinking than in earlier audit cycles.

86 The subset of reports providing information on collaborative arrangements indicates this to be an area in which there remains significant scope for progress. In general the remits of examination boards and the appointment and roles of external examiners are clear, with institutions committed to the same academic standards for their collaborative provision as for home campus programmes. However, the operation of collaborative arrangements and the management of partners prompted many recommendations for institutions.

87 The previous review did not consider the assessment of research students, but it is clear from these reports that the QAA 2005-06 review of institutions' policies and its recommendations had prompted significant institutional review, revision and standardisation of arrangements for the progression and assessment of research students.²⁰⁴

Conclusions

88 The audit reports that form the basis for this paper indicate that, with very few exceptions, institutions have robust processes involving significant externality for assuring the quality and standards of their home campus programmes. The Academic Infrastructure is well established as the framework for designing and calibrating higher education provision, is familiar to institutions, and has been especially influential in prompting them to articulate programme learning outcomes and associated assessment.

89 Programme approval (validation) and periodic review are effective processes for evaluating programme design, including assessment. Annual monitoring can be less

²⁰⁴ www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/OverviewrepENI.pdf and www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Report-on-the-review-of-research-degree-programmes-Wales.aspx.

Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09

effective, and audit reports make recommendations for improving the process, including the input of external examiners. Institutions need to have processes to guard against major programme changes resulting from accrued unmonitored minor changes. Programme specifications are near universal and besides providing a design and regulatory framework also serve as a source of programme information for interested parties. They typically incorporate learning outcomes together with matching assessment, although in a few cases generic learning outcomes and assessment need to be replaced by subject-specific ones, and module/unit outcomes need to be consistent with those for the programme overall. In their engagement with the Academic Infrastructure institutions have consolidated and built on the progress made in the previous two cycles of Institutional Audit.

90 External examiners play a key role in securing standards, and most institutions have correspondingly thorough arrangements for their appointment, induction and training, usually involving dual school/department and institutional components. The great majority of institutions use their external examiner expertise robustly and effectively for subject assessment purposes. Some reports noted effective institutional mechanisms for considering external examiners' reports and identifying generic issues, but in other cases there were recommendations for improvement to encourage more thorough reflection and to promote a more strategic institutional approach to standards and assessment.

91 Many institutions operate a two-tier structure (modules/units and programmes) for examination/assessment boards, often with different quoracy, chairing and reporting arrangements, although externals are usually present on both. The remit, conduct and reporting of examination boards provided several instances of good practice, but also some recommendations for action, although none were deemed to be essential. They included issues of quoracy, attendance and breadth of academic input, confidentiality and consistency in dealing with mitigating circumstances, and a need for externality on any senior body overriding examination board recommendations. While several reports noted variability in assessment procedures and practice by boards, including alternative classification schemes, local interpretation of resit eligibility, and variation in the exercise of discretion, this was much less marked than in previous audit cycles. Most institutions have moved to a common assessment framework for the great majority of their degree programmes, and institutional as opposed to disciplinary or subject determination of assessment schemes is much more evident than hitherto.

92 Several institutions had introduced effective student record systems which informed the business of examination boards and relevant central bodies, and others had constructive and realistic plans to augment their student database. However, there were also many recommendations for improved systems and/or more effective use of existing data on student retention, progression and achievement for assessment boards, and for central monitoring and review. The recommendations applied to representatives of all kinds of institution, suggesting this to be a sector-wide issue that may well be exacerbated by current developments in higher education.

93 The provision of timely, informative assessment feedback to students also remains a significant issue for the sector. Many institutions have introduced policies or statements of student entitlement with minimum expected standards, but monitoring these and ensuring compliance often remains problematic. The impression is that inconsistency within institutions in providing feedback is a particular source of student complaints. There is increased awareness of plagiarism, and many institutions have sought to counter it through a combination of policy and regulation, together with welcome educational initiatives to promote students' good academic practice.

94 Assessment in collaborative activity produced some instances of good practice, often relating to exemplary courses. However, there were also many recommendations

covering aspects such as the need for externality in assessment, for overseas external examiners to have experience of UK higher education, for the security of assessed work, the robustness of moderation, the need for legally binding agreements before registering students on programmes, the adequacy of monitoring arrangements, and information on transcripts and certificates. The general impression is that some institutions have less optimally designed and so less robust systems for assuring collaborative activities compared with home programme assurance, although all affirm the principle of common standards for both aspects of provision. Difficulties may occur when the partner institution is overseas and/or where the language of teaching and assessment is not English.

95 Most institutions had recently reviewed, and in many cases revised, their arrangements for monitoring and assessing postgraduate research students in light of QAA recommendations in this area. Progression panels with non-supervisory members, independent chairs for viva examinations, and embargoes on the supervisor(s) acting as examiners are, if not universal, now standard in the great majority of institutions.

96 Given current and impending changes in UK higher education, the rigour and assurance of academic standards and so of assessment is likely to remain under scrutiny within and beyond the sector. On the basis of the audit reports reviewed in this series, most universities and colleges are well placed to face many of the resulting issues, but some other concerns such as a more strategic institutional approach to standards, more effective use of student data to inform institutional thinking, the provision of speedy and informative assessment feedback, and more rigorous assurance of collaborative activity are likely to pose significant challenges for some institutions.

Appendix A: Features of good practice relating to assessment and feedback

- the development of a method of assessing musical performance which pays close attention to the maintenance of academic standards (Royal College of Music paragraph 56)
- the School's academically rigorous management of the assessment of those of its students who take the foreign language programme offered as part of its collaborative provision arrangements (London Business School paragraph 108)
- the clarity of definition and consistency of application of the procedure for the online submission of coursework which secures parity of treatment for students (University of Essex paragraph 41)
- the approach to and the consistent implementation of the policy on plagiarism, which provides clear guidance to students and promotes sound academic practice (University of Essex paragraph 42)
- 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 structure and operation of the annual examination review meeting, involving academic, administrative and support staff, as a means of reflecting on assessment practice and of disseminating good practice across the institution (Aston University paragraph 52)
- the development at departmental level of detailed discipline-related assessment criteria, based on the College's generic criteria (Goldsmiths College, University of London paragraph 38)
- the College's initiatives to support innovative practice in student assessment (Goldsmiths College, University of London paragraph 81)
- the considered steps being taken to focus on assessment for learning across the University (Leeds Metropolitan University paragraphs 50, 99)
- the work being undertaken by the University to guard against plagiarism (Leeds Metropolitan University paragraph 51)
- the clarity and comprehensiveness of assessment criteria (Leeds Trinity University College paragraph 28)
- the University's initiatives to improve student progression and achievement (Middlesex University paragraphs 37 and 64)
- the comprehensive analysis of data contained in the annual report on assessment (Middlesex University paragraph 38)
- the University's systematic approach to plagiarism and the work of the school plagiarism officers, which together provide comprehensive institutional regulations and guidance (University of East Anglia paragraph 43)

Appendix B: Recommendations relating to assessment and feedback

- review the requirements for quoracy for internal progression boards and ensure that they are observed for all meetings of the boards (Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication paragraph 55)
- ensure that at the earliest opportunity all remaining programme specifications are completed, and suitably comprehensive learning outcomes produced and published for all courses in the context of both undergraduate and taught master's programmes (School of Oriental and African Studies paragraphs 69 to 71)
- update the School's learning and teaching strategy and incorporate an assessment strategy (School of Pharmacy paragraphs 48, 80)
- articulate the institution's strategy for the operation and development of assessment practice (Bath Spa University paragraph 50)
- to ensure clear minimum expectations in the communication of assessment activities and criteria, to minimise the current variability and inconsistencies within and across courses, levels and their supporting documentation (Central School of Speech and Drama paragraphs 29, 42, 46, 47, 50, 57, 142)
- to review and update procedures for extenuating circumstances submitted by students to examination boards, to ensure appropriate student confidentiality and equity of treatment (Institute of Cancer Research paragraph 51)
- to ensure appropriate attendance by internal examiners at examination boards, to enable a full and comprehensive discussion of the modules under consideration (Institute of Cancer Research paragraph 53)
- to develop an assessment policy that clearly specifies assessment principles, procedures and processes and disseminate this to staff, students and external examiners (Institute of Cancer Research paragraph 54)
- to develop and express more clearly the links between intended learning outcomes, generic grading criteria and assignment marking criteria (Leeds College of Music paragraphs 50, 54, 55)
- to develop its framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, to enable the College to meet fully the requirements of the Open University's Handbook for Validated Awards (Leeds College of Music paragraphs 53, 58, 59, 65)
- to develop the management of assessment marks (Leeds College of Music paragraph 57)
- to develop a set of comprehensive assessment regulations clarifying the arrangements for the classification of Open University validated awards, progression from these awards, the consideration of borderline cases, and the application of compensation; and communicate these arrangements consistently to staff, external examiners and students (Leeds College of Music paragraphs 59, 62, 65, 66, 144, 145)
- devise and implement a means of ensuring independent oversight of all credit derived from summative assessment within collaborative provision which contributes to an award (London Business School paragraph 104)
- develop an assessment strategy that deals with issues of validity, reliability and consistency in order to underpin the comparability of standards across awards (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine paragraph 34)
- review the management of assessment, progression and degree classification procedures to ensure that they test that programme learning outcomes are met and that equitable treatment of students across the institution is assured (Loughborough University paragraphs 57, 64)

Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09

- monitor local assessment guidelines with a view to ensuring a consistent interpretation of academic regulations, equity of treatment for students and equivalence of approach to the management of assessment university wide (Roehampton University paragraph 32)
- ensure that mechanisms are in place to deal promptly with cases where students' module choices represent insufficient credit to satisfy the award or progression requirements of their programmes (Roehampton University paragraph 35)
- to put in place appropriate mechanisms and oversight to ensure internal comparability of academic standards (University of Bradford paragraph 80)
- to keep under review the balance between central policy and local flexibility with respect to assessment and feedback to students, so as to ensure that a consistent approach is maintained for students in all areas of provision (University of Brighton paragraphs 38, 77 and 90)
- to consider the introduction of a University-wide approach to penalties for late-submitted assessed work (University of Cambridge paragraph 57)
- review the application of the University's marking and assessment strategies with a view to ensuring comparability of practice across all schools (University of Exeter paragraph 72)
- check Codes in order to ensure compliance with its expectations, where, through school Codes of Practice and in order to reflect disciplinary differences, it permits variation in practice in assessment (University of Leeds paragraphs 57, 58)
- where university-level policy or procedural guidance is issued to schools, to make more explicit the degree of observance expected, so that it is clear whether local variation is appropriate (University of Southampton paragraphs 43, 87 and 96)
- to monitor closely the consistency of programme handbooks with the guidance to be developed by a University working group, and with particular emphasis on the clarity of information concerning assessment policies and regulations (University of Southampton paragraph 135)
- implement all elements of its Assessment Policy to enable it to meet its stated strategic objective of working towards the comparability of the student experience in assessment across its constituent colleges (University of the Arts London paragraph 54)
- ensure that feedback to students on their assessed work is consistently timely and effective in supporting learning (City University paragraph 57)
- to explore further the opportunities for greater consistency of operation and more effective use of supporting information in the work of examination boards (Goldsmiths College, University of London paragraph 34)
- facilitate student access to the rules on progression and classification of awards (Leeds Trinity University College paragraphs 29, 85)
- move expeditiously towards a decision on the anonymous-marking of coursework (Leeds Trinity University College paragraph 30)
- undertake with the University (as the degree awarding body) a review of the Institute's degree classification profile across its undergraduate programmes with due regard to national comparators across the sector (Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts paragraphs 53, 55).
- consistently apply the policies and guidance provided in the Academic Quality and Standards Handbook with respect to feedback to students on assessment (Nottingham Trent University paragraphs 50 to 52)
- address the variability in education practices at school level, to ensure equity of treatment of all students and of the student experience (Queens University Belfast paragraphs 81, 111, 122, 211)
- ensure that where inconsistencies at course level in regulatory and other areas are identified, clear institutional action is taken to ensure they are resolved (Royal Veterinary College paragraph 76)

- review and revise its assessment procedures to ensure greater consistency in the accuracy of recording and reporting of marks (Southampton Solent University paragraph 120)
- revise the information on extenuating circumstances provided to students to ensure that it accurately and consistently reflects the implementation of the policy (Southampton Solent University paragraph 286)
- in the light of previous progress on harmonisation, and in order to consolidate further the equivalence of the student learning experience, UCL should maintain its momentum towards achieving the institutional coherence on regulatory and academic processes identified by its own committees (University College London paragraphs 84, 98, and 203)
- where an institutional position has been reached on the harmonisation and simplification of regulatory and academic processes, UCL should seek to achieve full and timely departmental engagement and alignment (University College London paragraphs 84, 99, 163, 174 and 206)
- keep under review the extent to which the implementation and operation of the range of new policy initiatives (such as the assessment framework, personal tutoring, peer observation and staff appraisal) are producing the intended outcomes in terms of the management of academic standards and quality (University of Bath paragraphs 58, 83, 131, 139 and 141).
- ensure consistency of procedures for annual review and for granting extensions to coursework deadlines (University of Birmingham paragraphs 41, 45, 60, 62)
- develop a more closely defined and transparent mechanism for establishing the boundaries within which the moderation of marks should occur to ensure greater consistency across the University (University of Birmingham paragraph 57)
- that unit specifications, in detailing assessment criteria, consistently include, where applicable, an explanation of how the award of credit may be affected by criteria additional to marks in an examination or other formal assessment (University of Bristol paragraphs 28, 57)
- to move expeditiously towards its stated ideal of a University-wide method for degree classification (University of Bristol paragraph 51)
- investigate the exercise of discretion by Boards of Examiners in 2008-09, including the effectiveness of the training provided, making it the subject of a report by the University Chief Examiner, as soon as possible, following the current assessment round (University of Durham paragraph 56)
- to assure itself that the application in practice of policy and procedures for extensions to submission deadlines, and for extenuating circumstances, does not result in inequitable treatment of students (University of East Anglia paragraph 42)
- to revise the guidance for the conduct of assessment boards, to establish and secure University-wide specifications for minimum attendance and quoracy (University of East Anglia paragraph 46)
- ensure that, in reaching assessment board decisions, the regulatory framework is applied consistently, and judgements do not undermine the University's assurance of the standards of its taught undergraduate awards (University of Greenwich paragraph 68)
- to develop further, implement and publish protocols for ensuring that the academic standards of programmes delivered and assessed in languages other than English are equivalent to those delivered and assessed in English; in particular, and in the light of its risk-based approach to the oversight of modules delivered by partner institutions, to introduce and publish protocols for the moderation by University staff of modules judged to be of medium or high-risk (University of Hertfordshire paragraphs 40 to 42)
- to revise the generic grading criteria so that the grades align with those in the University's grading and marking scale, to further develop these grading criteria to

Outcomes from Institutional Audit: 2007-09

- differentiate between all levels and to ensure their consistent use and communication to students (University of Hertfordshire paragraph 45)
- review the assessment regulations for taught postgraduate programmes, to ensure that the required learning outcomes are met for all awards (University of Leicester paragraph 30)
- consider how assessed work can be returned in a timely fashion so that students can apply the feedback in subsequent assessment tasks (University of Northampton paragraph 58)
- that the University ensures that it has effective means to ensure oversight of equity of practice across colleges, especially where this affects student progression (University of Oxford paragraph 62)
- that the University should continue its work on identifying and addressing the gender gap in the examination performance of final-year students (University of Oxford paragraph 141)
- ensure that its policies for the management of the submission, security and return of student coursework are followed consistently (University of Portsmouth paragraph 69)
- improve the oversight of regulations pertaining to its awards (University of Sunderland paragraphs 24, 39, 42)
- encourage further consideration of how the University defines academic standards for its own awards, in order to engage the whole institution in articulating and applying clearly and consistently expectations of student achievement (University of Surrey paragraphs 45, 80, 82, 89, 93, 94)
- to review its management of joint honours courses, including the application of additional credit to such courses (University of Warwick paragraphs 58, 78, 90, 116)
- to secure consistency in the provision of assessment criteria at module level in the interests of equity of treatment of students across the provision (University of Wolverhampton paragraph 41).

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: 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, University of London
Lancaster University
Leeds Metropolitan University
Leeds Trinity University College
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.

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

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