



Outcomes from institutional audit

Initial overview



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Printed copies are available from:

Linney Direct
Adamsway
Mansfield
NG18 4FN

Tel 01623 450788
Fax 01623 450629
Email qaa@linneydirect.com

Summary

Institutional audit was introduced in England in 2002-03 for a transitional period of three years, during which all higher education institutions in England are to host an institutional audit. In 2002-03 and 2004-05, 70 institutions participated in audits.

Of these:

- 30 were universities before 1992
- nine were constituent institutions of the University of London
- 14 were designated universities by virtue of the *Further and Higher Education Act (1992)*
- four had powers to award taught degrees
- 13 were higher education institutions without their own degree awarding powers.

Of the 70 institutions hosting audits in this period, 15 can be considered to have specialist missions. Of these there are:

- seven institutions specialising in art and design
- four conservatoires
- one institution specialising in drama education
- two institutions focusing on agricultural and land-based activities and
- one stand-alone business school.

Overwhelmingly, the 70 published audit reports have expressed broad confidence in the soundness of institutions' current and likely future management of the quality of their programmes and the academic standards of their awards.

The reports of the 70 audits demonstrate that most institutions have established sound arrangements in:

- academic guidance support and supervision for students
- personal support and guidance for students, and
- staff support and development.

A substantial number of institutions can demonstrate strengths in the way they have designed their frameworks for managing quality and academic standards. There are, however, suggestions for further work in this area in a majority of reports. Similarly, with respect to assessment matters, while the majority of reports indicate features of good practice, there are a large number of recommendations in this area.

Other areas where the reports suggest development in institutions' arrangements include:

- internal approval of new programmes, and the monitoring and review of programmes (with annual monitoring being a particular focus)
- the use of external reference points, and
- the way institutions work with their external examiners and use their reports.

Preface

An objective of institutional audit is 'to contribute, in conjunction with other mechanisms, to the promotion and enhancement of high-quality in teaching and learning'. One of the ways in which this can be accomplished is through identifying features of good practice across the reports and areas where reports have commonly offered recommendations for improvement.

In due course, QAA intends to produce an extended reflection on institutional audit in the Learning from audit series, but since the final institutional audit reports in the present audit cycle will not be published until Spring 2006, *Learning from institutional audit* is unlikely to be published before late 2006. To give institutions and other stakeholders more timely information, QAA has therefore decided to produce a series of short working papers, describing features of good practice and summarising recommendations from the audit reports, to be published under the generic title *Outcomes from institutional audit* (hereafter, *Outcomes...*).

A feature of good practice in institutional audit is considered to be a process, a practice, or a way of handling matters which, in the context of the particular institution, is improving, or leading to the improvement of, the management of quality and/or academic standards, and learning and teaching. *Outcomes...* papers are intended to provide readers with pointers to where features of good practice relating to particular topics can be located in the published audit reports. Each *Outcomes...* paper therefore identifies the features of good practice in individual reports associated with the particular topic. A note on the topics identified for the first series of *Outcomes...* papers, to be published throughout 2005, can be found at Appendix 3 (page 10). It should be emphasised that features of good practice should be considered in their proper institutional context, and that each is perhaps best viewed as a stimulus to reflection and further development rather than as a model for emulation.

The first series of *Outcomes...* papers is based on the 70 institutional audit reports published by the end of November 2004. The second series will draw on institutional audit reports published following the 2004-05 audits, and it is likely that there will be some overlap in topics between the first and second series. Papers in each series are perhaps best seen as 'work in progress'. Although QAA retains copyright in the contents of the *Outcomes...* papers they can be freely downloaded from QAA's website and cited, with acknowledgement.

Introduction

1 This overview paper describes the overall characteristics of the institutions which were the subject of the 70 reports of the institutional audits carried out by QAA in 2002-03 and 2003-04. It also comments on the overall pattern of references to features of good practice and recommendations in the reports. A note on the methodology followed in producing the *Outcomes...* papers can be found in Appendix 4 (page 11).

The institutions and the institutional audit reports

2 The 70 institutional audit reports published by 5 November 2004 are listed in Appendix 1 (page 6). Of these, 24 relate to the 2002-03 session and 46 to the 2003-04 session. The broad characteristics of the institutions which were the focus of these reports are as follows.

Table 1: Types of institution

Year of audit	Pre-1992	University of London	Post-1992	University college	HE college	Other	Total
2002-03	3	7	2	3	9	0	24
2003-04	27	2	12	1	4	0	46
Total	30	9	14	4	13	0	70

3 The institutions audited in this period included 24 which, by reference to their mission, could be described as 'specialist': these are listed in Appendix 2 (page 9). They included five conservatoire-type institutions, seven institutions focusing on art and design and a stand-alone business school.

Table 2: Specialist institutions

Year of audit	Art and design	Conservatoire	Drama	Agricultural	Business school
2002-03	4	4	1	0	1
2003-04	3	0	0	2	0

The overall patterns of features of good practice and recommendations

4 In the 70 institutional audit reports from 2002-04 there are clear indications of strengths in the following areas.

Table 3: Features of good practice

Heading in Section 2 of the Main Report	Number of reports/ paragraph references
Academic guidance, support and supervision	50/110
Staff support and development	44/90
Personal support and guidance	39/70
Institutions' frameworks for managing quality and standards	31/61
[Discipline audit trails	31/74*]

*See below, page 11.

Recommendations

5 An analysis of the recommendations in each of the 70 published reports and their location in the Main Report shows clusters in the following areas.

Table 4

Heading in Section 2 of the Main Report	Number of reports/ paragraph references
Internal approval, monitoring and review	58/142
Institutions' frameworks for managing quality and standards	43/113
External reference points	39/77
External examiners and their reports	54/36
Academic guidance support and supervision	29/44
[Discipline audit trails	38/125*]

*See below, page 11.

6 The large cluster of recommendations in internal approval, monitoring and review has been subject to further - though still preliminary - consideration, which indicates the following distribution of recommendations.

Table 5

Heading in Section 2 of the Main Report	Number of reports/ paragraph references
Internal approval (of new provision)	23/31
Annual monitoring (of provision)	40/55
Periodic review (of provision)	23/40

Other topics in the reports

7 The reporting arrangements for institutional audit do not offer a single location for comments to be recorded on the quality management of assessment arrangements or on a number of other matters such as, for example, how institutions are meeting the needs of international students studying in England. Preliminary work to identify features of good practice and recommendations linked to assessment matters shows, however, that there are features of good practice linked to assessment in 46 reports (97 references). There are recommendations linked to assessment in 60 audit reports (169 paragraph references). These large clusters will be subject to further analysis in due course (see Appendix 3, page 10).

8 The structure of the institutional audit reports does not provide for separate comments on the support institutions provide for their international students. Nonetheless preliminary work to analyse features of good practice and recommendations in 'academic guidance, support and supervision' in the reports shows that many audit teams have taken care to enquire into how institutions check that their arrangements for their international students are managed. Comments on arrangements to support international students can be found in 61 of the 70 published reports. Of these, features of good practice are identified in 14 reports (22 paragraph references) and there are eight recommendations (eight paragraph references). Again arrangements for the academic and personal guidance, support and supervision of students, including international students, will be the subject of a later report in this series.

Appendix 1

The institutional audit reports

2002-03

University College Chichester, February 2003
The Royal Veterinary College, February 2003
Cumbria Institute of the Arts, March 2003
Institute of Education, University of London, March 2003
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, March 2003
Middlesex University, March 2003
Royal Academy of Music, March 2003
Royal College of Art, March 2003
University of Cambridge, April 2003
School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, April 2003
Bath Spa University College, May 2003
University of Lincoln, May 2003
London Business School, May 2003
Newman College of Higher Education, May 2003
Norwich School of Art and Design, May 2003
Rose Bruford College, May 2003
Royal College of Music, May 2003
Royal Northern College of Music, May 2003
The School of Pharmacy, University of London, May 2003
College of St Mark and St John, May 2003
The Surrey Institute of Art & Design, University College, May 2003
Trinity and All Saints College, May 2003
Trinity College of Music, May 2003
Royal College of Nursing Institute, July 2003

2003-04

University of Bath, October 2003
University of Bradford, November 2003
University of Buckingham, November 2003
University of Essex, November 2003
University of Exeter, November 2003

University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, November 2003
University of Sheffield, November 2003
Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, December 2003
Royal Agricultural College, December 2003
University of Southampton, December 2003
St Martin's College, Lancaster, December 2003
University of Surrey, Roehampton, December 2003
University of York, December 2003
University of East Anglia, January 2004
University of Durham, February 2004
University of Liverpool, February 2004
Writtle College, February 2004
Bournemouth University, March 2004
The Institute of Cancer Research, March 2004
University of Kent, March 2004
University of Leeds, March 2004
Loughborough University, March 2004
Open University, March 2004
University of Oxford, March 2004
University of Salford, March 2004
University of Warwick, March 2004
University of Wolverhampton, March 2004
Aston University, April 2004
University of Birmingham, April 2004
University of Bristol, April 2004
University of Central Lancashire, April 2004
Coventry University, April 2004
The London Institute, April 2004
University of Portsmouth, April 2004
Anglia Polytechnic University, May 2004
University of Brighton, May 2004
Brunel University, May 2004
University of Keele, May 2004
The Nottingham Trent University, May 2004



Appendix 1

University of Reading, May 2004

University of Sussex, May 2004

Wimbledon School of Art, May 2004

University of Greenwich, June 2004

King's College London, June 2004

University of Lancaster, June 2004

The Manchester Metropolitan University, June 2004

Appendix 2

Reports on specialist institutions

The Royal Veterinary College, February 2003

Cumbria Institute of the Arts, March 2003

Institute of Education, University of London, March 2003

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, March 2003

Royal Academy of Music, March 2003

Royal College of Art, March 2003

School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, April 2003

London Business School, May 2003

Newman College of Higher Education, May 2003

Norwich School of Art and Design, May 2003

Rose Bruford College, May 2003

Royal College of Music, May 2003

Royal Northern College of Music, May 2003

The School of Pharmacy, University of London, May 2003

The Surrey Institute of Art & Design, University College, May 2003

Trinity College of Music, May 2003

Trinity and All Saints College, May 2003

Royal College of Nursing Institute, July 2003

Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, December 2003

Royal Agricultural College, December 2003

Writtle College, February 2004

The Institute of Cancer Research, March 2004

The London Institute, April 2004

Wimbledon School of Art, May 2004

Appendix 3

Projected titles of *Outcomes...* papers

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

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

Title	To be published (dates are provisional)
Overview	April 2005
The Academic Infrastructure - programme specifications	April 2005
External examiners and their reports	April 2005
The Academic Infrastructure - The framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ)	April 2005
Academic guidance, support and supervision	May 2005
Student representation and feedback arrangements	May 2005
Staff support and development	May 2005
Validation and approval, annual monitoring, and periodic review	June 2005
Assessment and classification arrangements	June 2005
The Academic Infrastructure - subject benchmark statements	July 2005
Institutions' intentions for quality enhancement	July 2005
Collaborative provision in the institutional audit reports	August 2005
Progression and completion statistics and their use in quality and academic standards management	September 2005
Virtual learning environments (VLEs)	September 2005

Appendix 4

Methodology

The methodology followed in analysing the institutional audit reports uses the headings set out in Annex H of the *Handbook for institutional audit: England* to subdivide the Summary, Main Report and Findings sections of the institutional audit reports into broad areas. An example from the Main Report is 'The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision'.

For each published report, the text was taken from the documents published on QAA's website and converted to plain text format. The resulting files were checked for accuracy and coded into sections following the template used to construct the institutional audit reports. In addition, the text of each report was tagged with information providing the date the report was published and some basic characteristics of the institution (base data). The reports were then introduced into a qualitative research software package, QSR N6®. The software provides a wide range of tools to support indexing and searching and allows features of interest to be coded for further investigation.

An audit team's judgements, its identification of features of good practice, and its recommendations appear at two points in an institutional audit report: the Summary and at the end of the Findings; it is only in the latter, however, that cross references to the paragraphs in the Main report are to be found, and it is here that the grounds for identifying a feature of good practice, offering a recommendation and making a judgement are set out. These cross references have been used to locate features of good practice and recommendations to the particular sections of the report to which they refer.

Individual papers in the *Outcomes...* series are written by assistant directors with experience of institutional audit. To assist in compiling the papers, reports produced by QSR N6® have been made available to provide a broad picture of the overall distribution of features of good practice and recommendations in particular areas, as seen by the audit teams.

Note on discipline audit trails (DATs)

There are 75 references in individual paragraphs to features of good practice in the DATs and, similarly, recommendations linked to 125 paragraphs. Features of good practice and recommendations in the DATs will be subject to further coding and analysis in summer 2005.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
Email comms@qaa.ac.uk
www.qaa.ac.uk

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