



# **Outcomes from institutional audit**

## **Work-based and placement learning, and employability**



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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](mailto:qaa@linneydirect.com)

### Summary

Most of the institutional audit reports published by November 2004 refer to learning in the workplace. About one-fifth of these reports mention work-based learning, more than two-thirds mention programmes with placement elements and more than one in 10 mention sandwich programmes.

Most institutions engaged in work-based learning view it as a means of providing opportunities for extending the learning commenced by students at the institution (or with a partner) into another learning environment. In two institutions, learning in the workplace and away from the institution comprises the entirety of the students' programme. In one of these, the programme has been designed by the institution for delivery in many workplaces across the UK and further afield; by distance and flexible learning. In the other, programmes are individually negotiated between the student, the employer and the institution, with the process of negotiation being seen as one of several defining features of a highly individual approach. In both cases, the respective reports endorse the designs of the programmes and the associated supporting arrangements, although in one case the absence of progress files in the institution's arrangements occasioned comment.

Many audit reports focus on the approach taken by institutions to implementing *Section 9, Placement learning* (July 2001) of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*). In some cases, institutions offering placements had yet to address this section of the *Code of practice*. In several others, the way in which institutions have assessed their arrangements against the advice of *Section 9* has given rise to critical comment. A common feature in such cases was that institutions had not identified the full range of programmes to which the advice of *Section 9* might be relevant.

Where there are features of good practice in the management of placement provision, these suggest that considerable thought has been given to the design of learning support and quality management arrangements. In several cases, where instances of well-planned and managed placement arrangements are identified, institutions had identified as a focus for enhancement ensuring that all students benefited from consistently effective arrangements, including in the assessment of placements. Where audit reports have identified a lack of consistency in placement arrangements institution-wide, the potential for localised arrangements to give rise to less satisfactory placement experiences for students, and to compromise their learning, has led to comments and recommendations.

Some reports describe institutions' arrangements for gathering feedback on placements from employers, students and supporting staff. Few institutions appear to analyse information gathered from placement providers to inform the wider development of their portfolios.

About half of the 70 institutional audit reports published by November 2004 mention 'employability' and the topic is more frequently encountered in reports from 2003-04. In some reports employability appears to be used as a synonym for 'employment' and employment figures for graduates appear to be used by many institutions as a measure of success in addressing employability. While a few institutions have sought

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to enhance the employability of students through the provision of specially designed courses or modules (sometimes offered institution-wide) many more have focused on career planning and development, often focused on the introduction of personal and development planning (PDP).

### 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 and their location in the Main report. Although all features of good practice are listed, in the interests of brevity not all are discussed in this paper. In the initial listing in paragraph 9, the first reference is to the numbered or bulleted lists of features of good practice at the end of each institutional audit report, the second to the relevant paragraphs in Section 2 of the Main report. Throughout the body of this paper, references to features of good practice in the institutional audit reports give the institution's name and the paragraph number from Section 2 of the Main report.

It should be emphasised that the features of good practice mentioned in this paper should be considered in their proper institutional context, and that each might be viewed as a stimulus to reflection and further development rather than as a model for emulation.

This 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 might therefore best be 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.

### Work-based and placement learning

1 This paper is based on a review of the outcomes of the first 70 institutional audits published by 5 November 2004 (see Appendix 2, page 21). A note on the methodology used to produce this and other papers in the *Outcomes...* series can be found in Appendix 7 (page 28).

2 In institutional audit the defining source of information for the audit team is the self-evaluation document (SED), through which the institution participating in the audit sets out its own view of the distinctive features of its mission and way of working and demonstrates its capacity for critical self-evaluation. The SED and the supporting information on which it has drawn (and which is shared with the audit team), and the QAA template against which the report of the audit is constructed, set the parameters for the eventual institutional audit report.

3 The report template does not encourage the audit team to treat work-based learning as topic on which it is required to report, but if the institution hosting the audit identifies 'work-based learning', 'placement learning', or 'sandwich degrees' as distinctive features of its provision, the audit team will give careful consideration to the institution's view and will address it in the audit report. Hence, although work-based learning is not a separate topic in the audit reports, discussions of it and associated support arrangements are to be found in 12 reports (see Appendix 3, page 23), while 53 reports discuss study placements (see Appendix 4, page 24-25) and a further eight reports discuss sandwich programmes (see Appendix 5, page 26).

4 The compilation of this paper has been informed by the definition of work-based learning offered by Seagraves et al, cited in Appendix 1 (page 19). This suggests that the term work-based learning 'reflects a range of learning activities that are embedded in academic programmes and take place in a workplace'. It also suggests that usage of the term can encompass approaches which range from 'experiences with clear objectives and outcomes related to improving application of theory to practice and vice versa, to enhancing core and key competencies related to the subject area, and improving employability'. This definition may be taken to be more inclusive than the definition put forward in a Southern England Credit Consortium (SEEC) consultation document in 2002 (and cited in the University of the West of England introduction to work-based learning at Appendix 1), viz, that work-based learning is 'negotiated, defined and understood by all parties, adequate opportunities and support are provided for learning to occur, and the achievement of the intended outcomes are demonstrated and assessed'.

5 This paper discusses elements of provision defined by institutions (and referred to in the relevant audit reports) as work-based learning, but it also discusses placement provision and programmes with a sandwich element of placement in the workplace which fall into the broader descriptive definition.

6 The definition of placement learning used in this paper is taken from the Glossary on page four of *Section 9*. This defines placement learning as 'a planned period of learning, normally outside the institution at which the student is enrolled, where the learning outcomes are an intended part of a programme of study. It includes those circumstances where students have arranged their own learning opportunity with a placement provider, with the approval of the institution'.

7 It should be noted that 35 of the first 70 institutional audit reports discuss 'employability' to some extent and that features of good practice are identified in connection with this topic in 13 reports. There are also recommendations in five of the 35 reports.

8 A consideration of how the audit reports published by November 2004 discuss employability can be found at paragraph 45 below.

### Features of good practice

9 Consideration of the published institutional audit reports shows the following features of good practice:

#### Work-based learning

- the innovative and robust procedures in place for ensuring the quality of work-based learning [Middlesex University, paragraph 192 iv; paragraph 149]
- the high calibre of the programmes of study including learning materials and Study Guides provided to students [Royal College of Nursing Institute, paragraph 158 i; paragraph 95].

#### Sandwich provision

- the University's development and management of placements in student learning [Aston University, paragraph 253, v; paragraph 131].

#### Placement provision

- the work of the Woodhouse Centre to support students in their work placements, and recent graduates throughout the first five years of their professional lives, and to support students undertaking performance work outside the College and as teachers of music [Royal College of Music, paragraph 183 iv; paragraph 113]
- the engagement of some subjects with regional bodies [University College Chichester, paragraph 58, bullet 5; paragraph 132]
- the institution's guidelines on the development of good practice in work placements [Surrey Institute of Art & Design, University College, paragraph 147 v; paragraphs 40 and 94]
- the effective monitoring and development at local level of the central placement element in community and youth studies [College of St Mark and St John, paragraph 189 viii; paragraph 147]
- the coherence of the student experience with regards to professional practice [Cumbria Institute of the Arts, paragraph 179 iii; paragraph 113]
- the University's commitment to the development of placement opportunities and the communication of their benefits to students and its efforts to enhance the employability of its students through the opportunities provided by the placement scheme [Brunel University, paragraph 216 iii; paragraphs 97, 122, 125 and 201]
- the thoughtful and reflective approach to course design, teaching and student learning in a number of academic departments [University of Lancaster, paragraph 238 bullet 2; paragraph 93]

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- links with practice at school and departmental level. In particular, the variety of links with industry, professional bodies and practice used to inform the curriculum, assist student employability and support research [University of Reading, paragraph 187 i; paragraphs 5, 34, 107, 130 and 134]
- the comprehensive Course Developers Guide that has had a positive impact on the development of consistent practice [University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 198 ii, paragraphs 27 and 135]
- the support of students provided by central services, including the [Learning Resource Centre], within the context of widening participation and diversity [Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 212 ii; paragraph 136]
- the academic and pastoral support and guidance provided to students [Writtle College, paragraph 182 iv; paragraph 116].

10 In addition to the features of good practice identified above, the audit reports also include one recommendation relating to work-based learning and nine recommendations relating to placement learning. There are no recommendations in connection with sandwich provision.

### Themes

11 Grouping the features of good practice and recommendations in the audit reports which relate to work-based learning (defined broadly) suggests the following broad themes:

- approaches to the introduction of work-based learning
- placement learning with particular reference to responses to *Section 9* of the *Code of practice*
- quality management arrangements
- assessment of learning outcomes in placements
- feedback from employers.

### Work-based learning

#### Approaches to the introduction of work-based learning

12 Discussions of work-based learning in the institutional audit reports cover:

- its definition
- its contribution to the curriculum
- preparation and support for students undertaking work-based learning and for staff in the institution and in the place of study, and
- the contribution of work-based learning to enhancing relations between the institution and employers.



### The definition of work-based learning

13 In the case of one institution, the institutional audit report noted that the University had recognised the distinct nature of work-based learning studies (WBS) by designating it 'as a field of study rather than simply a mode of study' [Middlesex University, paragraph 140]. This had enabled the University to disseminate the understanding among its staff that '[WBS] students are working on programmes agreed between the University, the employer and the student, rather than being students on placement...' [Middlesex, 141], an approach close to that set out in the SEEC consultation paper cited in paragraph 4 above.

14 In the relevant institutional audit, WBS was identified as the focus for a discipline audit trail. This provided opportunities for meetings with staff and students, and to consider the measures the University had put in place to develop, monitor and review its WBS provision. The audit report noted that students worked within individually negotiated schemes and that, although this rendered cohort progression statistics inapplicable, statistics for individual students and their progression had been carefully maintained by the University. The information available for the audit indicated that while there was a 'relatively high level of deferral (currently 18.9 per cent) which reflects the non-traditional entry to this provision and the needs of mature students', nonetheless 'the overall successful completion rate is high and demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach to learning for part-time mature students who are in work'.

15 The institutional audit report found that *Section 9* of the *Code of practice* had been embedded in the University's WBS framework. At the time of the audit the revised version of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* (2004) had yet to come into effect. But the report noted that the University had also embedded into its WBS framework QAA's *Guidelines on distance learning* (1999) and it was able to endorse the University's view that its arrangements were consistent with the advice of both documents.

16 The audit report found that, in line with the advice of the precepts of the *Code of practice*, the University had developed a coherent assessment strategy for its WBS, 'aspects of good practice which were well-evidenced included the careful articulation of assessment tasks with demonstration of qualities identified in the [*Framework for higher education qualifications*], the detailed and supportive feedback which was meticulously articulated with programme and module learning outcomes, and the effective use of the University's 20-point grading scale to identify students' level and depth of learning within a progressive taxonomy'. The report also noted that (individual) programme specifications had been carefully articulated in all cases with *The framework for higher education qualifications*. Entries in the students' handbooks for WBS provided them with 'a firm foundation for the negotiation of individualised learning packages that are expressed as learning agreements which take into account the needs of learners and their employers'. Overall, the way Middlesex University had handled the development of its work-based learning provision was identified in the audit report as a feature of good practice.

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17 In other institutional audit reports the approach taken to the introduction and support of work-based learning in the relevant institutions does not seem to have been articulated in the same manner as that described above: individual schools, departments and fields appear to have adopted work-based learning as a means of extending or refreshing the curriculum. For example, in one instance, work-based learning had been incorporated at level 2 in the History curriculum in order to advance the 'subject-specific skills, reflexivity, independence and employability' of students. In this case the audit report found that this and other innovations had enabled the subject team to link with the institution's Work Related Learning Project, a Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) supported project - the HEFCE History 2000 Consortium - and other (unspecified) regional networks. The report concluded that 'the School's provision demonstrated its capacity for development which was both creative and carefully managed' [University of Keele, 124].

18 In other cases noted in the audit reports, developments in work-based learning have been described chiefly in terms of support arrangements for students studying for awards through distance learning and for students on placements and/or undertaking sandwich elements of their programmes of study. They are, therefore, considered below in the wider context of the arrangements institutions have made to support students and staff undertaking and supporting learning in the workplace.

### Flexible and distributed learning modes in support of work-based learning

19 In one audit report, where the relevant institution delivered the greater part of its provision through distance learning, the process through which it commissioned and published study guides and supplementary information in hard copy was described in detail, with the learning support arrangements through which students could gain access to the institution's branch libraries and learning resource centres across the UK. Students studying with this institution also have the support of two outreach librarians and access to a virtual learning environment (VLE) and measures have been taken to improve the 'information literacy' of students. In this instance, the report identified the 'the high calibre of the programmes of study including learning materials and Study Guides provided to students' as a feature of good practice [Royal College of Nursing Institute, 95]. The same report also noted the importance of measures being introduced by the institution for students studying overseas to compensate for their inability to participate in periodic tutorials.

### Preparation and support for students undertaking work-based learning

20 Precept 5 of *Section 9* suggests that institutions 'should ensure that students are provided with appropriate guidance and support in preparation for, during and after their placements.' In the case of an institution which was working with partners to deliver a Foundation Degree, the institutional audit report noted that face-to-face tutoring, including in the context of the workplace, was provided through staff based in the partner institutions. The latter were said to work closely with a member of academic staff based in the awarding institution, who oversaw the production of written and other study materials. In addition, the awarding institution provided support for the Foundation Degree students through its own VLE. While fully acknowledging that this development had encountered no difficulties to date, the

audit report advised the awarding institution to consider 'what approach it will take in order to ensure that students studying via such modes of delivery will have access to academic guidance and support equivalent to those enjoyed by students studying on-campus, and by face-to-face methods of delivery'.

21 Similar comments and advice were offered in another institutional audit report where the students' written submission, while supporting work-based and work placement activities for students, 'expressed some concern about the large number...who were unsuccessful in gaining a placement'. In this case the institution was advised to reflect 'on the current work placement offer in courses, in order to ensure that students have realistic expectations when preparing for work-based learning modules'. In this particular instance it appeared to be the case that while encouraging students to aspire to work placement as part of their studies and, having adopted formal assessment for such placements, difficulties in securing placement opportunities had led to a situation where students asserted that it was 'more usual' for them 'to engage in writing a reflective essay on an identified industry provider in order to achieve the expected assessment requirements, than reflect on the experience of an actual work placement'.

### Preparation and support for staff supporting work-based learning

22 The additional guidance to Precept 6 of *Section 9* of the *Code of practice* suggests that institutions should consider the extent to which 'the development needs of institutional placement staff are met'. In the instance described in paragraph 20 above, the awarding institution had made what the report considered to be appropriate arrangements to support the staff in the partner institution in writing study guides and support materials. In another case, the audit report described how 'work-based practice activities [were] supervised by external practice tutors'. In this instance the institution had developed 'appropriate formal mechanisms for the accreditation of...external tutors' together with a range of other support measures including 'formal training, mentoring by a Regional Diploma Coordinator, end of course debriefing sessions and a confidential student debrief questionnaire'. Consistency in assessment arrangements was achieved through the convocation by the Director of Taught Postgraduate Studies of a 'Moderating Group to review marking by external practice tutors and report discrepancies to the Board of Examiners'.

23 One audit report noted that development of work-based learning in the relevant institution had benefited from 'a constructive relationship with an experienced examiner [who] had assisted the programme team over a period of time to develop a meaningful and rich work-based framework' [Newman College, 160].

### Enhanced feedback from employers

24 For many institutions working to embed skills for employment and careers advice in the curriculum, or contemplating doing so, the close work with employers necessitated by the development of work-based learning provision can provide enhanced opportunities to gather feedback from employers on their experiences of continuing and former students. In one case, a report noted 'that information on employers offering work-based learning through sandwich placements was routinely collected from

[programme boards] through [annual quality monitoring] and that employer satisfaction had recently been introduced as a performance measure in the Corporate Plan'.

25 Most of the institutional audit reports published by November 2004 discuss institutional arrangements for learning through placements to some extent, usually in the context of exploring the institutions' engagement with *Section 9*. Of these, 12 reports discuss the approaches the relevant institutions have taken to offering learning through placements, while in seven reports the relevant institutions' approaches to implementing *Section 9* are described in terms which can be summarised as 'work in progress'. A further seven reports identified institutions as offering learning through placements but indicated that they had yet to address the advice offered by *Section 9*. Feedback from employers is considered further in paragraph 42 below.

### Placement learning, including sandwich provision

#### Institutional approaches to the management of placement learning

26 When considering how institutions have managed the quality of their placement provision, almost all the audit reports refer to *Section 9* of the *Code of practice*. Where the institutional audit reports discuss institutional frameworks for the management of placement learning, two overall approaches seem to predominate. In the first, which might be viewed as holistic and institution-wide, institutions can be seen to have achieved, or be working towards, the adoption of consistent arrangements across all their provision, at all levels, for managing and supporting placement learning. The second approach, identifiable in a smaller number of cases, appears to be for institutions to allow subsidiaries (whether faculties, schools or departments) with a particular rationale for offering learning through placements to develop their own individual arrangements.

27 Of the institutions seeking to adopt a holistic approach, one, working almost wholly in the field of education and related research, had identified the importance of providing 'uniform quality in placement settings regarding the consistency of teaching support and supervision in partner schools', noting that 'this was a national issue for teacher training'. In its SED, the institution had noted that it was continuing to work 'with other teacher training providers in [its] area and with the Teacher Training Agency' but that it was confident that its current arrangements were fully consistent with the advice of *Section 9*.

28 In another report, a similar concern to ensure institution-wide consistency of approach had led to the agreement and distribution of institutional guidance on placement learning and the establishment of 'the broad principle...that all components that contribute to [the institution's] degree will be assessed [by it]' [University of Oxford, 73 and 126]. Similarly, in another institution, schools had come together to produce 'a comprehensive handbook on placement learning' and had established a 'Placement Tutors' Forum...to enable the sharing of good practice' [University of Bradford, 114].

29 Several reports describe arrangements for the management of placement learning, which had been delegated by institutions to their subsidiary schools or departments, but where the former were confident that their arrangements were consistent with the advice of *Section 9*. To a greater or lesser extent, in each case the relevant reports found that the outcomes of such delegated arrangements might not be all the institution had intended. For example, in the case of a collegiate institution, the audit report noted that the relevant body charged by the institution with offering a view on the applicability of individual sections of the *Code of practice* had decided that *Section 9* had only 'limited relevance' to the work of the institution and its constituents, although provision offered by the constituent parts of the institution included language programmes providing study placements overseas.

### **Institutional responses to *Section 9* of the *Code of practice*, *Placement learning***

30 More than half of the institutional audit reports published by November 2004 indicate that institutions were aware that *Section 9* of the *Code of practice* offered advice that would be relevant to their activities, although a minority of the published reports indicate that institutions had yet to give detailed consideration to this section.

31 Comments in several reports suggest that in some cases where institutions had given consideration to *Section 9*, there might be deficiencies in their arrangements for considering its advice on the management of placement learning. Instances have already been cited where an institution had not spotted that this section of the *Code of practice* might be applicable to language students studying abroad. In another case, an institution had initially come to the view that because the Department for Education and Skills had published guidance on teaching practice, the advice of *Section 9* did not apply to students undertaking programmes of study in initial teacher education (ITE) 'and had only recently appreciated that *Section 9* of the *Code of practice* was relevant to ITE placements'.

32 Other reports offer comments and recommendations to the effect that where institutions have promulgated a policy or set of procedures (in this particular instance in connection with placement learning), they should satisfy themselves that their requirements are being recognised and implemented by those managing the relevant provision. In one report, in this case on an institution with a substantial portfolio of sandwich provision, it was noted that an internal audit of the arrangements for placement learning had been conducted prior to the publication of an institutional policy statement on the management of placements. This statement had not, however, subsequently been assimilated into the institution's quality handbook, and the report surmised that this might account for the 'little awareness' staff had of the University's policy on placements and their management.

### **Quality management arrangements for placements**

33 Precept 2 of *Section 9* of the *Code of practice* advises institutions to 'have in place policies and procedures to ensure that their responsibilities for placement learning are met and that learning opportunities during a placement are appropriate'. Several of the institutional audit reports published by November 2004 describe good practice in placement arrangements. For example, one report found that the relevant institution's

strong relations with employers and other higher education institutions in the EU had assisted its arrangements to support sandwich training. The report noted that 'Placement monitoring and assessment processes are well-defined' and that where placements involve other higher education institutions the relevant Schools had 'established detailed arrangements for negotiating and approving inter-institutional agreements to support student placements and exchanges' [Aston University, 131].

34 The same report also noted that before 'commencing an exchange, students are briefed in detail, and each student is party to a learning contract which defines the University's expectations and assessment criteria'. The report noted that the institution's internal quality management arrangements made specific provision for its internal programme reviews to gather evidence on the experience of students undertaking placements and to report on the overall picture. In this instance, the report stated that 'the University's arrangements to monitor and manage the placement and exchange opportunities it provides for its students are sound and are a feature of good practice'.

35 A number of reports noted that the negotiation and agreement of a suitable placement could present a considerable challenge to students. In several cases, reports describe arrangements made by institutions to 'broker' contacts between students and potential placement providers. In one such instance, the institution had established a specialist Centre which was responsible, among many other activities, for 'finding paid and unpaid work for current students, and supporting them in such work...brokering various types of work experience' [Royal College of Music, 113]. In a number of other instances, however, it appears to be the case that students are expected to arrange their placements without assistance.

36 Several reports describe the arrangements institutions have put in place to prepare their students for their placement and to provide support throughout its duration. For example one institution was said to provide a two-day induction for placement students and to appoint an external tutor to watch over their progress and to keep in touch with them throughout their placements via email. The relevant report noted that a recent report by a professional statutory and regulatory body had additionally recommended that each student should have 'an identified supervisor at the placement site'. The expectation of regular email contact between the student on placement and the home institution appears to be common.

37 In a number of other instances, however, quality management arrangements for placements appeared to be less well-developed than in the cases cited above. One report, for example, linked to an institution where the incorporation of work-based study and study placements were a central feature of its programmes, noted that the institution had yet to engage with the Academic Infrastructure. In connection with placements, the report noted that there were no 'formal means to gather and evaluate information on [their] conduct'. The report suggested that with projected increases in the size of the institution's student body 'there is scope...to request feedback information from partners in order to satisfy itself that the interests of its students are being served'.

### Assessment arrangements for placements

38 Precept 1 of *Section 9* advises that where 'placement learning is an intended part of a programme of study, institutions should ensure that: their responsibilities for placement learning are clearly defined; the intended learning outcomes contribute to the overall aims of the programme; and any assessment of placement learning is part of a coherent strategy'. Several of the institutional audit reports published by November 2004 describe work in progress by institutions to achieve greater institution-wide consistency in the assessment arrangements applied to placements. Taken together, these suggest that many institutions might have identified for themselves a need to adopt or update assessment arrangements for work undertaken by students while on placements in order to improve robustness and consistency.

39 For example, in a report which has already been cited, it was noted that the institution's own reviews of its quality arrangements had included one of 'schools' conventions for the assessment of sandwich placements' and that at the time of the audit the institution's Senate 'was...about to consider new, more consistent regulations for the assessment of sandwich placements'. Likewise, a different institution 'had introduced a process of cross-subject moderation to compare marks given by different subject teams and to make recommendations and adjustments where necessary. This process currently involves the moderation of work placement activities' [Newman College for Higher Education, 49]. In a third institution, the report noted that members of staff had described 'a well-developed process whereby College staff normally visit the students on placement, and in all cases double-mark written work' [Rose Bruford College, 115]. Lastly, in another report - again within the context of a discipline audit trail - it was noted that the relevant institution had 'recently introduced a systematic process to accredit studies undertaken in a placement abroad'.

40 The evidence of the institutional audit reports suggest that such methodical approaches may not have been uniformly adopted across the sector. For example, another report which again drew on information gathered in the course of a discipline audit trail, described the assessment of students 'while on their one-year placement in Europe', which counted for '20 per cent towards their final degree mark'. Summarising findings from consideration of the institution's records, the report noted that 'learning in certain European universities had not been assessed in Europe in other than a fragmentary way and that translation of the resulting marks to the [institution] had, therefore, not been fully secure'. In this case, as part of a wider set of recommendations, the relevant part of the institution was advised to 'review its relationships with those European universities that fail to assess adequately substantial amounts of lecture material'. The same report also noted, however, that the concerns expressed by external examiners about the 'assessment of work performed on the industrial placement programme' had recently been addressed by the institution.

41 Overall, a number of reports recognise the value of the work being undertaken by some institutions to enhance assessment arrangements for placements. There is evidence in other reports, however, of a need for institutions to be able to identify the challenges inherent in assessing learning outcomes from work undertaken by students in other institutions and in workplace environments. Consideration of the reports

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overall suggests that, at the time of the relevant audits, a number of institutions had yet to adopt robust and consistent institution-wide procedures for the assessment of learning outcomes from placements.

### Feedback from employers

42 An earlier paper in the present *Outcomes...* series has addressed student representation arrangements and arrangements to gather and analyse feedback to institutions from students, graduates and employers of students. This paper found that few features of good practice had 'been identified in the area of feedback from graduates and employers' [paragraph 34]. It suggested the possibility that this might be because 'the contribution that stakeholders other than their students can make to the enhancement of quality and standards has yet to achieve widespread institutional recognition', although it also noted that several reports had 'noted a tendency in self-evaluation documents to underplay the extent of the links the respective institutions had established with graduates and employers' [ibid].

43 The additional guidance to Precept 8 of *Section 9* of the *Code of practice* suggests that those institutions offering learning through placements should seek to use 'formal and informal means of gathering feedback from placement providers about the placement arrangement'. One report noted that the relevant institution collected feedback from placement providers on the students' preparedness for the placement, and their achievements throughout it, but suggested that opportunities to build on such relationships to gather feedback from employers more widely were being missed. Several other reports commented in similar terms although one institution has sought to deal with this disjuncture by putting its Careers Service and its Placement Development Unit under one umbrella.

44 Overall, the evidence gathered for this paper supports the view reached in the earlier *Outcomes ...* paper, cited above, that:

'Links with graduates and employers appear to be strongest in small specialist institutions where there are often close connections with the professions through tutor practitioners and visiting alumni and the external involvement of staff. The opportunity for employers and recent graduates to contribute to quality assurance processes in larger institutions seems mainly to be confined to vocationally orientated programmes, where professional body accreditation requirements and work placements ensure close links in the form of industrial liaison committees and similar advisory bodies.' [Ibid, paragraph 35.]

## Employability

### Definitions/interpretations

45 In their 2004 paper for the Learning and Teaching Subject Network Generic Centre, Mantz Yorke and Peter Knight find that the term 'employability' can be used variously to indicate:

- getting a graduate job



- possession of a vocational degree
- formal work experience
- good use of non-formal work experience and/or voluntary work
- possession of key skills or suchlike
- skilful career planning and interview technique
- a mix of cognitive and non-cognitive achievements and representations.

46 As noted in paragraph 2 above, the way in which an institution has chosen to discuss its mission and the way it works, and the contents of the indicative template for the institutional audit reports, set the broad parameters for the report itself. In this particular case, the indicative template for the institutional audit report does not prompt audit teams to address 'employability', so that if the institution itself does not define and/or use the term in its internal documents, and particularly in its self-evaluation, the term may not be used in the published report.

47 It may also be worth noting that the first two years of institutional audit (2002-04) coincided with increasing interest on the part of the Government and HEFCE in developing the discussion and consideration of employability, and the appearance of that term in institutions' internal and external discourses. In the latter there is some evidence to suggest that in some cases it replaced terms already in use such as 'core skills' or 'key skills' and sometimes it subsumed them. Perhaps because of the developing nature of this agenda, while employability is mentioned in six of the 24 reports from 2002-03, it is mentioned in 29 of the 46 reports from 2003-04.

### Features of good practice

48 Overall, employability is mentioned in 35 of the 70 institutional audit reports published by November 2004. Of these, 10 reports identify features of good practice which could be linked to processes to enhance the capacity of students to gain employment. These include:

- [Royal College of Music, see above]
- [Brunel University, see above]
- [University of Lancaster, see above]
- the University's support for its Careers and Guidance Service, and many features of the work of the Service itself; and the work of the Department of Student Guidance and Welfare and the Counselling Service [Loughborough University, paragraph 317 viii; paragraph 136]
- the proactive stance taken by the University in giving guidance and support to students [Open University, paragraph 207 iv; paragraph 118]
- the proactive approach to the development and piloting of [Personal and Academic Development Plans] [University of Sheffield, paragraph 231 i; paragraph 39]
- the programme for students leading to the Warwick Skills Certificate [University of Warwick, paragraph 200 iv; paragraph 111]

## Outcomes from institutional audit

- the continuing development of a range of local and central student support services, notably the expansion of dedicated arrangements for assisting students to improve their mathematical and academic writing skills [Coventry University, paragraph 273 iii; paragraph 129]
- the [Student Experience Initiative], stage 1 of which has been successfully implemented University-wide to strengthen the personal tutor system [University of Greenwich, paragraph 270 iii; paragraph 131]
- the way the University continues to drive forward the employability agenda in a wide range of activities to the benefit of its students and other stakeholders [The Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 236 i; paragraph 119].

49 The reports also contain five recommendations linked to employability.

50 The ways and contexts in which term employability appears in the reports may be represented by the following table, in which reports may be coded to more than one cell

'Getting a graduate job'	13 reports
'Possession of vocational degree'	0 reports
'Formal work experience'	4 reports
'Good use of non-formal work experience and/or voluntary work'	1 report
'Possession of "key skills" or suchlike'	4 reports
'Skilful career planning and interview technique'	19 reports
'A mix of cognitive and non-cognitive achievements and representations'	2 reports

51 The information on which this table is based suggests that for many institutions employability and employment are largely synonymous, with graduate employment rates - usually based on first destination statistics - serving as a key indicator of institutions' success in promoting the 'employability' of (mostly undergraduate) students. In a similarly large number of reports, employability is chiefly discussed in connection with the work of careers services, and careers counsellors and tutors. In five of these reports PDP is also discussed in conjunction with employability.

### Employability and the curriculum

52 Around 13 of the 70 institutional audit reports published by November 2004 mention curriculum developments, which might be taken to be indicative of the broader approach to employability, described by Yorke (see Appendix 1, page 19). Of these, the development of work-based learning by Middlesex University has

already been described (see above, paragraphs 14-16) and several other reports describe the development and introduction of specific modules or courses specifically intended to enhance employability, while several others describe institutions' ambitions 'to support the delivery of employability skills across all areas of the curriculum and at all levels of provision'. In several such cases a common feature is the incorporation of prompts to address employability in the validation of new programmes and the review/revalidation of the existing provision.

### Employability linked to career and personal development planning

53 For a substantial number of institutions the introduction PDP, often linked to progress files, and enhancements to support for career guidance and counselling, constitute the key means through which they are seeking to address employability. In six institutional audit reports PDP is specifically identified as forming part of the institution's approach to encouraging employability, while in 25 reports employability is linked (sometimes loosely) to the work of careers advisers. In some instances audit reports indicate that institutions are seeking to link developments involving PDP to the enhancement of their careers services and curriculum development.

54 Of the other categories offered by Knight and Yorke, only one report can be said with confidence to describe an approach which brings together a 'mix of cognitive and non-cognitive achievements and representations' which in this case is linked to the institution's development of work-based learning (see paragraph 14 above).

### Conclusions

55 Of the institutional audit reports published by November 2004, more than 90 per cent referred in some way to learning in the workplace. Of these, 15 reports mention work-based learning, 53 mention programmes with placement elements and eight reports mention sandwich programmes.

56 From the institutional audit reports which describe arrangements for work-based learning it is clear that most institutions have seen it as a means of providing opportunities for extending the learning students have begun at the institution (or with a partner) in another learning environment. In some cases, however, learning in the workplace and away from the institution comprises the entirety of the students' programme. In one instance, a programme has been designed by the institution for delivery to a substantial number of students, in many workplaces across the UK and further afield. In another, programmes are individually negotiated between the student, the employer and the institution, with the process of negotiation being regarded as one of several defining features of a highly individual approach. In both these cases, the respective reports endorse the designs of the programmes and the associated supporting arrangements.

57 Where audit reports discuss work-based learning or placement learning they generally appear to focus on several key points, the most prominent of which is usually the institution's approach to implementing *Section 9* of the *Code of practice*. In a number of cases, the reports note that institutions offering placements had yet to address this section of the *Code of practice*. In several others, the way institutions had

assessed their existing arrangements against the advice of *Section 9* was identified as deficient. A common feature in such cases was a failure to identify the full range of programmes within which placements might be offered and to which the advice of *Section 9* might be relevant.

58 A number of reports identified features of good practice in the ways in which institutions manage their placement provision. In each case it was clear that the institutions concerned had devoted considerable thought and effort to the design of learning support and quality management arrangements to provide, among other things, clear frameworks through which students, tutors, employers and administrators could identify how to initiate a placement, how to undertake it, how to assess what had been learned, and how to monitor and review the placement process itself. Such institutions were also likely to be seeking to obtain, or to maintain, consistently effective arrangements for placements for all of their students. In these reports, the achievement of institution-wide consistency in the assessment of placements appeared to be an important goal. In other cases, however - and particularly where institution-wide consistency had not been identified as necessary - the potential for localised arrangements to give rise to less satisfactory placement experiences for students could lead to comments and recommendations in reports.

59 While a number of reports describe institutions' arrangements to elicit feedback from employers, students and supporting staff on the placement experience, the gathering and analysis of such data does not always appear to feature in institutions' quality arrangements. Furthermore, consideration of the audit reports suggest that few institutions use to the full the opportunities placement links with employers present to gather information to inform the development of their portfolios more generally.

60 The development of the national agenda for employability has coincided with the first years of institutional audit. Possibly for that reason, employability is mentioned less frequently in audit reports from 2002-03 than in those from 2003-04. In many cases, good employment figures appear to be seen by institutions as evidence that their existing strategies, policies and practices are successful in implanting employability.

61 From the published reports, it appears that in about half of the reports which mention employability, the approach institutions are taking to its development focuses on additional support for their careers services, with some reports specifically linking employability, careers development and PDP.

## Appendix 1

### Definitions of work-based learning

The definition of work-based learning used in this paper is drawn from that adopted by the University of the West of England (itself drawn from a 1996 study by Seagrave, et al and cited at <http://www.uwe.ac.uk/wbl/define.shtml>)

'Definitions of work-based learning

- 1 learning for work
- 2 learning at work
- 3 learning from work.'

(Seagraves et al 1996)

Work-based university learning is:

'That learning which...[utilises] opportunities, resources and experience in the workplace. It will, in general, have outcomes relevant to the nature and purpose of the workplace...the learning achieved will include appropriate underpinning knowledge and will be tailored to meet the needs of the student and the placement (Margham 1997).'

### Description of work-based learning

'Work-based learning reflects a range of learning activities that are embedded in academic programmes and take place in a workplace. The purpose of the experience is multi-faceted. This ranges from experiences with clear objectives and outcomes related to improving application of theory to practice and vice versa, to enhancing core and key competencies related to the subject area, and improving employability.

'As described in the recent SEEC (2002) consultation document, in many programmes work-based learning is "negotiated, defined and understood by all parties, adequate opportunities and support are provided for learning to occur, and the achievement of the intended outcomes are demonstrated and assessed" (SEEC 2002).'

### Employability

This paper has made use of the working definition and associated 'elaboration' developed in Professor Mantz Yorke's paper *Employability in higher education: what it is - what it is not* (2004) for the Higher Education Academy/LTSN Generic Centre. This suggests that: 'There are many interpretations of 'employability" and, citing Knight and Yorke, (2004) and Pierce (2002) that these include:

- getting a 'graduate' job
- possession of a vocational degree
- formal work experience
- good use of non-formal work experience and/or voluntary work
- possession of 'key skills' or suchlike

- skilful career planning and interview technique
  - a mix of cognitive and non-cognitive achievement and representations
- and that these can be mapped onto three 'superordinate constructs of employability':
- employability as demonstrated by the graduate actually obtaining a job
  - employability as the student being developed by his or her experience of higher education (ie, it is a curricular and perhaps extra-curricular process) and
  - employability in terms of the possession of relevant achievements (and, implicitly, potential).

Knight, PT and Yorke, M *Employability: judging and communicating achievements*, Learning and Teaching Subject Network (LTSN), 2004

Pierce, D *Employability: higher education and career services*, Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS), 2002, cited in Yorke 2004.

Yorke, M *Employability in higher education: what it is - what it is not*, LTSN/Higher Education Academy, 2004.

## **Appendix 2 - 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  
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 3**

#### **Institutions described in the institutional audit reports as offering programmes of study incorporating work-based learning**

Middlesex University, March 2003

Newman College of Higher Education, May 2003

The School of Pharmacy, University of London, May 2003

Royal College of Nursing Institute, July 2003

Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, December 2003

St Martin's College, Lancaster, December 2003

University of Birmingham, April 2004

Coventry University, April 2004

The London Institute, April 2004

University of Brighton, May 2004

University of Keele, May 2004

Wimbledon School of Art, May 2004

## **Appendix 4**

### **Institutions described as offering programmes of study involving 'placements'**

University College Chichester, February 2003

The Royal Veterinary College, February 2003

Institute of Education, University of London, March 2003

Cumbria Institute of the Arts, March 2003

Middlesex University, March 2003

University of Cambridge, April 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

The School of Pharmacy, University of London, May 2003

Rose Bruford College, 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

University of Bath, October 2003

University of Bradford, 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  
University of Leeds, March 2004  
Loughborough University, March 2004  
University of Kent, March 2004  
University of Oxford, March 2004  
University of Salford, 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  
Brunel University, May 2004  
University of Keele, May 2004  
The Nottingham Trent University, May 2004  
University of Reading, May 2004  
University of Sussex, May 2004  
University of Brighton May 2004  
Wimbledon School of Art, May 2004  
University of Greenwich, June 2004  
University of Lancaster, June 2004  
King's College London June 2004  
The Manchester Metropolitan University, June 2004

## **Appendix 5**

### **Institutions described as offering programmes of study with 'sandwich' elements**

Bournemouth University, March 2004

University of Kent, March 2004

University of Wolverhampton, March 2004

Aston University, April 2004

University of Central Lancashire, April 2004

Coventry University, April 2004

Anglia Polytechnic University, May 2004

Brunel University, May 2004

## Appendix 6

### 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	Publishing date (provisional)
Overview	April 2005
Programme specifications	April 2005
External examiners and their reports	April 2005
Staff support and development arrangements	October 2005
Student representation and feedback	November 2005
Programme monitoring arrangements	January 2006
Assessment of students	January 2006
Learning support resources (including virtual learning environments)	January 2006
Validation, approval and periodic review	January 2006
Work-based and placement learning, and employability	March 2006
International students and their support	March 2006
Collaborative provision	March 2006
Academic advice, guidance and supervision	March 2006
Progression and completion statistics	April 2006
Institutions' frameworks for managing quality and standards	May 2006
Specialist institutions	May 2006

## Appendix 7

### 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 Adobe Acrobat® documents published on the Agency's web site 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.

**Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education**

Southgate House  
Southgate Street  
Gloucester  
GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000  
Fax 01452 557070  
Email [comms@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@qaa.ac.uk)  
[www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

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