QAA

Outcomes from institutional audit

Academic guidance, support and supervision, and personal support and guidance

Summary

Consideration of the institutional audit reports published by November 2004 shows that, in general, institutions have established a wide variety of effective arrangements for the academic guidance, support and supervision of their students, and for providing them with appropriate personal support and guidance. It is noteworthy that the published reports identify many more features of good practice than recommendations in these areas. Overall, the reports suggest that the provision of academic and personal support for students is an area of strength in many institutions.

Features of good practice are cited in 58 reports. They reflect the extent to which the institutions concerned have developed effective strategies for academic and personal support in general and, where appropriate, have taken steps to modify provision in the light of changing demand and student feedback. More specifically, they also reflect the extent to which institutions have established appropriate arrangements for student induction and progress monitoring, for the development of key skills, for personal development planning (PDP), for supporting postgraduate research students, and in relation to the provision of specialist services and student information.

Recommendations are found in 28 audit reports. In a limited number of reports, these reveal concerns about such aspects as: provision for the monitoring and review of student support systems; the support provided for postgraduate research students; the clarity of information provided to students about the forms of academic and personal support available to them; the provision of careers advice; and the implementation of PDP. In a larger number of reports, there is some evidence that the personal tutoring systems that provide the basis for the provision of front-line academic support for undergraduates in many institutions, do not always work as intended. The reports suggest that work is required in some institutions to ensure that the responsibilities of tutors and the entitlements of students are clear, that local provision meets minimum requirements, and that the systems operate in accordance with institutional intentions, to ensure an equitable experience for all students. In many cases, it is apparent that the difficulties identified are acknowledged by the institutions concerned and that action has been taken, or is in hand, to address them.

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 2007. 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. In the initial listing of features of good practice in paragraph 5, the first paragraph 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 is perhaps best viewed as a stimulus to reflection and further development rather than as a model for emulation. A note on the topics identified for the first series of *Outcomes...* papers, to be published throughout 2005, can be found at Appendix 3 (page 23).

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 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 its website and cited, with acknowledgement.

Academic guidance, support and supervision, and personal support and guidance: introduction and general overview

1   This paper is based on a review of the outcomes of the first 70 institutional audits published by 5 November 2004 (see Appendix 1, page 20). A note on the methodology used to produce this and other papers in the *Outcomes…* series can be found in Appendix 4 (page 24).

2   The *Handbook for institutional audit: England* (2002) states that 'an emphasis on students' lies at the centre of the (institutional audit) process - in terms of the quality of information they receive…, the ways in which their learning is facilitated and supported, and the academic standards they are expected to achieve…'. To reflect this emphasis, institutional audit reports contain two sections specifically relating to the provision of support for students, headed 'Academic guidance, support and supervision' and 'Personal support and guidance' (in one or two reports, these sections are combined into a single section). In the interests of brevity, these headings are abbreviated to 'academic and personal support' in the remainder of this paper.

3   Inevitably there is some overlap between the institutional audit report sections that focus on academic and personal support and other areas of the reports, particularly the sections relating to 'Learning support resources' and in respect of research degree supervisors and graduate teaching assistants) 'Assurance of the quality of teaching staff through staff support and development'. *Outcomes…* papers have already been published on these sections. In addition, the academic and personal support sections commonly contain information relating to work-based learning, employability and support for international students, which are also the subject of earlier papers in the *Outcomes…* series. This paper therefore excludes consideration of features of good practice and recommendations that deal specifically (and exclusively) with learning resources, international students, aspects of work-based learning and support for research degree supervisors and graduate teaching assistants, but it does include, where appropriate, consideration of matters relating to the underpinning structures such as, for example, the provision of careers guidance as an integral part of student services. There may, however, be some overlap in the material presented in this group of *Outcomes…* papers.

4   All of the 70 audit reports include a significant amount of information relating to academic and personal support and the material used in this paper is not restricted to that taken from the reports that contain formal features of good practice or recommendations.

Features of good practice

5   Features of good practice in relation to academic and personal support are cited in 58 institutional audit reports. In total almost 90 features of good practice are cited in a wide range of areas. For ease of reference they are listed below under broad thematic headings.

The general quality of student support and the general approach to its provision:

(Note: although some of the features of good practice listed under this heading appear somewhat generalised, the majority of individual reports contain details of the range of arrangements and student services that have contributed, in each case, to the findings of an audit.)

- the many features of the University's support for its students including… the high levels of access students have to the advice of their tutors…(and) the development of drop-in centres to give support, for example, in mathematics, grammar and programming [Aston University, paragraph 253 ii; paragraphs 110, 114 and 118]

- the organisation and operation of central services for students undertaken by the Department of Student Services [University of Bath, paragraph 203 ii; paragraph 104]

- the level and quality of staff support for students [Bath Spa University College, paragraph 179 iii; paragraphs 82-83 and 85-86]

- the accessibility and responsiveness of staff to students on taught programmes [University of Bristol, paragraph 288 v; paragraph 120]

- the commitment of staff to providing academic and pastoral support for students [University of Buckingham, paragraph 136 ii; paragraphs 81-87]

- the quality of support to students provided by all staff, and (in particular) the work of the Institute's [Centre for Academic and Professional Literacy Studies] CAPLITS [Institute of Education, University of London, paragraph 159; paragraphs 70-73]

- the wide range of student support services provided by the University [Keele University, paragraph 208 v; paragraph 110]

- the integration of college-wide support services with the guidance available to students at departmental level [King's College, University of London, paragraph 269 v; paragraphs 132 and 136]

- the University's coordinated approach to student support [University of Leeds, paragraph 213 iii; paragraphs 109-111]

- the academic and personal support available to students [University of Lincoln, paragraph 268 iii; paragraphs 122, 128 and 130]

- the demonstrable commitment across the University to the enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience [The Manchester Metropolitan University, paragraph 202 iii; paragraphs 93-95]

- the institutional provision of a supportive and high-quality learning environment for students [The Manchester Metropolitan University, paragraph 202 vi; paragraphs 93 and 101]

- the range and integrated nature of the academic and personal support and guidance provided to students [Newman College of Higher Education, paragraph 210 v; paragraphs 131 and 136]

- the consistent commitment of the University to its support of students and their learning, and its student-centred approach, illustrated through the work of student services, (and) in the academic support provided by academic staff [Nottingham Trent University, paragraph 236 ii; paragraphs 113 and 118]

- the proactive stance taken by the University in giving guidance and support to students [Open University, paragraph 207 iv; paragraphs 110 and 118]

- the development of a strong and supportive culture of student support, with highly accessible staff and responsive mechanisms [University of Portsmouth, paragraph 258 iii; paragraphs 114-121]

- the academic and personal support for students provided by course teams at programme level [Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 210 i; paragraphs 134, 156 and 169]

- the support of students provided by central services...within the context of widening participation and diversity [Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, paragraph 210 ii; paragraphs 136 and 143]

- the academic and pastoral support available to its students [Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 143 iii; paragraphs 77 and 99]

- the way in which the Academy systematically tries to provide an individually tailored learning experience for its students [Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 143 iv; paragraphs 83 and 87]

- the approach to the support and development of students…which both draws on and enhances professional practice [Royal College of Nursing Institute, paragraph 158 iv; paragraphs 96-103]

- a distinctive and caring ethos, which is an expression of the College's Christian mission and heritage and contributes to the students' feeling that they are valued and supported [College of St Mark and St John, paragraph 189 ii; paragraph 100]

- the supportive collegiate ethos for staff and students [St Martin's College, Lancaster, paragraph 217 vii; paragraph 124]

- central student support mechanisms which are responsive to student needs and are subject to effective evaluation processes [University of Sheffield, paragraph 231 ii; paragraphs 101-102]

- the support extended by its student support services [Surrey Institute of Art and Design, paragraph 147 vii; paragraphs 65-66 and 96]

- the academic and personal support services provided to students by the Roehampton Educational Development Centre [University of Surrey, Roehampton, paragraph 171 ii; paragraphs 85 and 103]

- the accessibility of academic staff to students and the positive ways in which they respond to student needs [University of Surrey, Roehampton, paragraph 171 iv; paragraph 80]

- the imaginative and distinctive approach the University has taken to creating an integrated system of student support [University of Sussex, paragraph 259 iii; paragraphs 122-131]

- the development of systematic and interlocking support arrangements which enable students to derive maximum benefit from their involvement in the College community [Trinity and All Saints College, paragraph 147 vii; paragraph 74]

- the student centred ethos which encourages individual student achievement [Trinity College of Music, paragraph 153 ii; paragraphs 68 and 95-97]

- the wide variety of support available to students to enable them to access appropriate learning resources [Trinity College of Music, paragraph 153 iv; paragraph 102]

- the supportive academic environment…of which an important feature is the availability of staff, including visiting lecturers, to students [Wimbledon School of Art, paragraph 239 ii; paragraphs 138-139]

- the wide range of support provided for the different communities of students [University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 295; paragraph 162]

- the academic and personal support and guidance provided to students [Writtle College, paragraph 182 iv; paragraphs 101-117]

- a robust system of academic and pastoral student support through the distinctive supervisory system and college structures, which sustain the particular ethos of the University [University of York, paragraph 198 iv; paragraphs 94-98]

Personal tutoring and supervisory systems:

- the development of training for supervisors through UTAs [University Teaching Associates] (researchers with experience in giving undergraduate supervisions, who have been trained to train others for their role as supervisors) [University of Cambridge, paragraph 202 ii; paragraph 70]

- the effective work of the Senior Tutors' Committee and its strategic role in assuring quality and standards [University of Cambridge, paragraph 202 iii; paragraph 82]

- the procedure introduced in one school of returning coursework to students through the adviser system in order to encourage discussions about student progress [University of East Anglia, paragraph 275 iv; paragraph 119]

- 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 University's support for its students…for example through its personal tutor arrangements, including the use of Co-Tutor software to track and record students' meetings with their tutors [Loughborough University, paragraph 317 vii; paragraphs 127 and 134]

- the high level of resources made available for supporting students' learning [University of Oxford, paragraph 247 vi; paragraphs 108 and 121]

- the exemplary integrated student support provision incorporating the Academic Tutor system [The School of Pharmacy, University of London, paragraph 159 iv, paragraphs 97 and 106]

Support for postgraduate research students:

- the clear improvement in the support provided for research students [Anglia Polytechnic University, paragraph 261 iii; paragraph 120]

- the provision of 'probationer MPhil' arrangements sessions for intending higher degree research students [University College Chichester, paragraph 58; paragraph 152]

- the academic support arrangements for research students, which provide regular and systematic support for student progress and are subject to effective evaluation processes [University of Exeter, paragraph 266 iii; paragraph 118]

- the combination of the supervisory team, the student portfolio and the MPhil to PhD viva, as formative instruments in ensuring successful student progression through their chosen programme of study [Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 142 ii; paragraph 82]

- the work of the [Doctoral School] in providing a supportive framework for research students [Institute of Education, University of London, paragraph 159; paragraphs 110-119]

- the arrangements that are in place to enable research students to be part of a flourishing research community [The London Institute, paragraph 242 iv; paragraphs 134-138]

- the School's procedures for monitoring and supporting the experience of students undertaking research degrees [London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraph 134 i; paragraphs 23, 85 and 87]

- the third-party monitoring system for research students [Open University, paragraph 207 v; paragraph 113]

- the Research Student Handbook [Royal College of Art, paragraph 156 ii; paragraphs 54 and 88]

- the strategy for the operation of research degrees…through an established research community of staff and students [Royal College of Nursing Institute, paragraph 158 ii; paragraphs 100-102]

- the comprehensive support and monitoring of research degree students [University of Surrey, Roehampton, paragraph 171 v; paragraphs 81-82]

- the supervisory arrangements for research degree students in general and the support and guidance to new research students in particular [Wimbledon School of Art, paragraph 239 iv; paragraphs 143-145]

Student induction, monitoring and retention:

- the development of an online system for monitoring student progress [the Cambridge Colleges' Online Reports for Supervisions] [University of Cambridge, paragraph 202 iv; paragraphs 79, 81 and 119]

- the pattern of support provided to students before and during induction to enhance their early experience of university life, and improve student retention [University of Central Lancashire, paragraph 198 v; paragraph 92]

- the procedures in place for identifying, supporting and monitoring students at risk of not progressing or completing awards [Newman College of Higher Education, paragraph 210 iv; paragraph 130]

- the arrangements for student induction [College of St Mark and St John, paragraph 189 iii; paragraph 101]

- the School's practice for identification and support of students at risk [The School of Pharmacy, University of London, paragraph 159 iii; paragraphs 80 and 97-98]

- the monitoring of student attendance and arrangements to support students in difficulties [School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, paragraph 299 vi; paragraph 218]

- the measures taken to improve retention [University of Wolverhampton, paragraph 295; paragraphs 144 and 153]

The provision of specialist services:

- the special measures taken to support students with disabilities and additional needs…[Aston University, paragraph 253 ii; paragraphs 122 and 123]

- the coordinated support for students with special needs [Brunel University, paragraph 216 v; paragraphs 129 and 201]

- the liaison arrangements between its schools…and the Careers Service [University of East Anglia, paragraph 275 iii; paragraph 126]

- 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; paragraphs 136-140]

- the high quality careers service provided to students and graduates [University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, paragraph 165 iv; paragraph 84]

- the work of the Woodhouse Centre to support students in their work placements… and to support students undertaking performance work outside the College… [Royal College of Music, paragraph 183 iv; paragraph 113]

- the concern to support students with a disability [Royal Northern College of Music, paragraph 120 ii; paragraph 79]

- the support offered to former students through the Sound Advice scheme [Royal Northern College of Music, paragraph 120 v; paragraph 81]

- the approach to support for students with disabilities, which includes measures to raise awareness across the College and to promote dissemination of good practice [College of St Mark and St John, paragraph 189 iv; paragraph 107]

- the support given to students with special needs [School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, paragraph 299 iv; paragraphs 122 and 125]

The provision of information:

- the provision of on-line information to students through the University's 24-7 website as a key feature of the enhancement of student learning opportunities [Middlesex University, paragraph 192 iii; paragraphs 82 and 87]

● the continuing positive contribution of the Educational Development Unit in the support provided…to students of the University [University of Salford, paragraph 208 ii; paragraph 95]

Personal development planning (PDP):
● the Graduate School's engagement with the PDP agenda for postgraduate research students through the development of the Graduate PDP [University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, paragraph 165 iii; paragraph 78]

● the proactive approach to the development and piloting of personal and academic development plans [University of Sheffield, paragraph 231 i; paragraphs 39 and 98]

Key skills:
● 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 programme for students leading to the Warwick Skills Certificate [University of Warwick, paragraph 200 iv; paragraphs 111 and 132]

The quality assurance of student support:
● action to evaluate the efficacy of the college experience and the introduction of a Dean of Colleges and Student Support [University of Durham, paragraph 212; paragraphs 96-97]

● the means by which the University promotes continuous improvement in an area of recognised strength through further development of its arrangements for student support [University of Exeter, paragraph 266 ii; paragraph 118]

Other areas:
● the role of the mediation service in prompt and effective resolution of a significant proportion of student complaints and appeals [University of Bristol, paragraph 288 vi; paragraph 126]

● the coherence of the student experience with regards to professional practice [Cumbria Institute of Arts, paragraph 179 iii; paragraph 113]

● arrangements to offer students accepted onto courses immediate access to intranet forums [London Business School, paragraph 204 vii; paragraph 122]

● the careful development and introduction of peer support for learning [Norwich School of Art and Design, paragraph 154 viii; paragraph 83]

● the encouragement that the College gives to reflective practice [Rose Bruford College, paragraph 150 iv; paragraph 109]

● the coherence of the student experience with regard to professional practice [Royal Northern College of Music, paragraph 120 iii; paragraph 80]

● the student support on the 2+2 scheme [University of Warwick, paragraph 200 iii; paragraphs 107 and 161].

Recommendations

6   Recommendations for further action or development relating to academic and personal support are found in almost half of the audit reports. In some instances, the scope of the recommendation is not restricted to academic and personal support; rather the recommendation is broader in nature, relating to (for example) variability in the operation of procedures, including those relating to the provision of student support. The major themes emerging from the recommendations are explored, in paragraphs 7-33.

Themes

7   In the 70 audit reports considered, the major themes relating to the provision of academic and personal support are:

- institutional strategies relating to the provision of academic and personal support

- personal tutoring and supervisory systems for undergraduate students

- support for postgraduate research students

- the provision of specialist services, including careers advice and PDP

- the provision of information relating to academic and personal support

- the monitoring and review of academic and personal support systems.

Institutional strategies relating to the provision of academic and personal support

8   It is apparent from the audit reports that most institutions have adopted a model of academic and personal support that is based on local, frontline provision of guidance by academic schools or departments, extended and supported by the provision of central, professional student services. Although in many instances the distinction is by no means clear cut sometimes deliberately so - see this paragraph and paragraph 18. In broad terms, the support and guidance provided by schools is academic in nature, and the support and guidance provided centrally is more generic and personal, geared towards matters such as study skills, welfare and careers. In many cases these separate sources of support have been judged by audit teams to be complementary, with the various structures, procedures and facilities combining to provide an integrated system that is identified as a feature of good practice in several reports [Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 99; Newman College of Higher Education, paragraphs 131 and 136; Trinity College of Music, paragraph 107; Trinity and All Saints College, paragraph 74; Kings College, University of London, paragraph 136; University of Leeds, paragraphs 109-111]. An audit report on one institution, where the predominant mode of study is through distance learning, is clear that equivalent integration has been established through 'the effective combination of the personal support provided by regional staff…on the one hand, and the paper-based and on-line support, on the other' [Open University, paragraph 110]. Another report, on an institution which is attempting to dissolve the distinction between local and central services by locating professional advisers within academic schools, highlights 'as good practice the imaginative and distinctive approach…taken to creating an integrated system of support which takes as its premise the indivisible nature of academic and pastoral care' (while emphasising the need to monitor the success of the new arrangements) [University of Sussex, paragraphs 122-131; paragraph 139].

9   Audit teams have also commented favourably where an institution's strategy for the provision of student support is part of, or is linked clearly to, wider corporate strategies. One institution has a 'Student Support and Guidance Strategy' as part of its strategic plan [Newman College of Higher Education, paragraph 125]; another is praised for the way in which its services have been developed to match its particular institutional context and the needs of its distinctive, part-time student body [Open University, paragraph 110]. Where an institution's strategic approach to the provision of student support appears to need strengthening, this is the subject of comment: one institution, for example, is asked to give further consideration to the links between its learning and teaching strategy and associated strategies for academic, personal and learning support and staff development. Several reports describe the ways in which student support strategies have been reviewed and modified in the light of changes to the national higher education context, including higher student numbers, increased numbers of part-time and distance learning students, and the need to improve retention and 'maximize…potential for students from wide and varied social backgrounds'. One report acknowledges the difficulties inherent in providing a consistent service to an increasingly diverse student population, and praises the institution's efforts to review and improve its systems, for example through the establishment of a dedicated senior post to 'develop an integrated approach to student support throughout all sectors of the University' [University of Durham, paragraphs 96-97].

10   There is some suggestion in the audit reports that arrangements are particularly effective when a senior committee carries responsibility for institutional student support strategies and has oversight of their delivery. Several institutions are reported as having a dedicated 'Student Support Committee' or similar body [University of Leeds, paragraph 109; University of Cambridge, paragraphs 79 and 82], which enables them to maintain an overview of provision and, in particular, ensure that it remains equitable across different student groups and different areas of the institution. One institution, in response to a perceived lack of coordination in student services provision and variability in tutorial support, has developed a 'Student Entitlement Framework' setting out minimum expectations. It has established a 'Student Experience Forum' to provide links between schools and centralised student support services, with the aim of providing greater coordination and an integrated approach.

Personal tutoring and supervisory systems for undergraduate students

11   In more than 80 per cent of the audit reports published by November 2004, there are indications that a personal tutoring or supervisory system is one of the primary means by which the institutions concerned provide support for their undergraduate students; where no tutorial system exists, the reports usually indicate that this is part of a deliberate institutional strategy. However, it is notable that of the many features of good practice in the area of academic and personal support, few relate to personal tutoring, although around a third of the recommendations fall into this category. All of the tutoring systems described in the reports are based primarily on the work of academic staff. Most would appear to focus primarily on the provision of academic guidance, but it is evident that the meaning of terms such as 'tutor', 'supervisor' and 'academic adviser' varies between institutions - a 'tutor' may be

responsible for academic guidance and instruction in a student's discipline, and/or for more general academic advice, and/or for pastoral support. A small number of reports state explicitly that tutors (or equivalent) are responsible for providing both academic and personal support for students. In considering paragraphs 12-20 below, it is important to bear in mind that not all of the reports are clear about the nature and extent of tutors' responsibilities.

12   The most frequent criticism of personal tutoring arrangements relates to variability in their operation. While it appears that most student groups who met audit teams expressed general contentment with the level of provision overall, a significant number drew attention to inconsistency in the number and frequency of meetings between tutors and tutees across (and, in some instances, within) academic schools and disciplines, coupled with variation in the approach to recording the outcomes of those meetings. At least one audit report stated that students who met the audit team had themselves never met their personal tutors.

13   Several audit reports ascribe these difficulties to the absence of institutional guidelines on how personal tutoring is expected to operate and, consequently, to the absence of minimum requirements in respect of the frequency of meetings and a lack of clarity about the responsibilities of tutors. The institutions concerned are advised to establish a 'threshold level of guidance and support' across departments and 'standard guidelines to assure consistency of experience for all students'. In other cases, however, the reports indicate that institutional guidelines exist, and that the inconsistencies stem instead from their implementation at school and departmental level. In one instance, an audit team encountered a student group that felt that the University's guidelines on personal tutoring were not being observed consistently. In this case, the report acknowledges that there are 'many different ways by which academic and personal support could be delivered by departments' but interprets the variability as highlighting 'some of the tensions arising from devolution of responsibility to departments'. In a similar vein, another team comments that variations are not necessarily a weakness, as long as they are understood and appropriate, but suggests that the institution concerned might 'reflect upon the advantages and disadvantages of defining more closely the boundaries of permitted local variations'. A further institution is asked to monitor its revised personal tutor system 'to ensure the appropriate balance is struck between departmental variability and the need to secure consistency and equity for all students'. Finally, one institution operating a deliberately flexible system, in order to target support according to 'student type and culture', is cautioned that a wide variety of systems could lead to 'a lack of equivalence in the provision of academic support' for different student groups.

14   Some audit reports draw attention to more specific consequences of variability in the provision of tutorial support. Two reports indicate that the lack of systematic training for personal tutors 'could lead to inconsistencies' in the advice and support offered to students. One report comments that such inconsistencies may impact on the success with which the institution can implement PDP. A number of reports link the variability in the provision of tutorial support with inconsistencies in the provision of feedback to students on their assessment performance; in all three cases, the reports contain related recommendations. Several reports perceive some uncertainty

about the locus of tutorial responsibility for combined or dual honours students and indicate that particular problems may be caused if their entitlements are not closely defined. Four reports make recommendations that include reference to this matter.

15   In addition to the difficulties caused by variability, several reports are critical of personal tutor systems that rely on the student, rather than the tutor, to initiate meetings. Some reports indicate that, although there are documented institutional expectations in respect of personal tutoring, responsibility for arranging the required meetings is placed on the student, a process that only works properly for students who actively seek advice, as the institutions have themselves recognised. One report remarks that both undergraduate and postgraduate students are left to make their own arrangements for dissertation supervision and that clearer guidelines on the institution's generic expectations are required. More favourably, one report notes that the institution concerned has recognised that its personal tutor system is too reliant on student proactivity and, in accordance with its retention strategy, has undertaken various measures to boost the support provided for students who are less proactive, including the establishment of a staff development programme for personal tutors.

16   In general, it is clear from the reports that some personal tutoring systems have been placed under strain by expansion in student numbers, decreased staffing levels and other factors. It is also evident that many institutions have recognised weaknesses in their current arrangements and have, through a process of review and modification, attempted to improve their systems. In some institutions, this has been linked to a need to improve retention rates; in others, it has been in response to student feedback.

17   Where audit teams have commented favourably on tutorial systems, they have often highlighted the steps taken by the institutions to improve arrangements and address previous concerns. One institution, for example, has developed its personal tutor system and also appointed 'Student Support Coordinators' in order to improve retention and to improve consistency in the provision of academic support by its schools [University of Wolverhampton, paragraphs 144-145]. Another institution, in response to student dissatisfaction, has developed a new 'Progress Tutor System', integrated with PDP. A third institution has sought to strengthen the personal tutor system through the establishment of an institution-wide 'Student Experience Initiative' which stipulates 'particular forms of entitlement for students…translated into explicit standards' against which academic schools must align their practices [University of Greenwich, paragraph 131]. Other initiatives designed to strengthen existing arrangements include the provision of appropriate staff training [University of Cambridge, paragraph 70; Aston University, paragraph 118]; the development of codes of practice, resource packs and other documentation for tutors [Writtle College, paragraph 104; University of Greenwich, paragraph 131]; clearer specification of rules, responsibilities and minimum requirements; and the use of strategic committees to coordinate arrangements, achieve common standards and disseminate good practice [University of Cambridge, paragraphs 79 and 82]. Two reports draw attention to the good practice found in comprehensive institutional arrangements for monitoring student progress, particularly the progress of those perceived to be 'at risk' [The School of Pharmacy, University of London paragraph 98; Newman College of

Higher Education, paragraph 130]. Two further reports identify, as a feature of good practice, the development of internet-based systems for monitoring and recording student progress [University of Cambridge, paragraphs 79, 81 and 119; Loughborough University, paragraph 127].

18   As stated in paragraph 8, institutional audit reports do not always provide a clear picture of tutors' responsibilities in individual institutions, particularly in respect of their role (if any) in providing personal, as well as academic, support. It seems possible that this lack of clarity reflects some imprecision, or at least a certain amount of indecision, within some of the institutions concerned. It is evident from many of the reports that in a number of instances, internal reviews of student support have included consideration of the distinction to be drawn between academic and personal support and have led, on occasion, to a re-definition of roles. In some cases, the distinction has been reinforced, in other cases it has been collapsed, and in others it remains a matter requiring further debate and clarification. Several reports draw attention to confusion about roles, particularly those that seem to have a similar purpose, such as 'personal tutors' and 'academic advisers' and emphasise the importance of ensuring that, where similar roles exist, students understand them and know where to find help if they need it.

19   Taken as a whole, the institutional audit reports do not provide a consistent message as to whether there are benefits in assigning to academic staff responsibility for both academic and personal support, or whether the provision of personal support is best confined to central services. However, several reports indicate that personal tutor systems that combine academic and personal support can work well and provide flexibility [University of Exeter, paragraph 118; University of York, paragraphs 94-98], and one report describes as 'a significant strength' the fact that 'the structure of tutorial support does not explicitly differentiate between academic guidance and pastoral support which enables course scheme managers and year supervisors to identify problems related to the students' academic performance' [Writtle College, paragraph 105]. Where no formal tutorial system exists, the message is similar. One institution without a personal tutor system, for example, is described as having 'no standard position with respect to the expectation that academic and pastoral support roles should be separate or unitary'. In this case, the audit team found the systems to be 'working as intended and achieving beneficial outcomes, [Nottingham Trent University, paragraphs 112-116].

20   In general, the audit reports suggest that it may be appropriate to permit some flexibility in the operation of personal tutoring, providing that staff and student responsibilities and entitlements are properly defined. They also suggest that institutions have specified minimum expectations in respect of the number and frequency of tutorial meetings, and that provision is made for keeping the systems under regular review.

Support for postgraduate research students

21   Where relevant, most of the audit reports include information relating specifically to the support provided for postgraduate research students. In respect of two institutions, both with a large postgraduate population, this area was the subject

of all or part of a thematic enquiry during the audit visit. Taken as a whole, the reports describe a wide range of procedures that have been established by institutions to support their research students. In a number of cases, the comprehensive student support frameworks that have been established are identified as features of good practice [University of Exeter, paragraph 118; Institute of Education, University of London, paragraphs 110-119; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraphs 85-87; Institute of Cancer Research, paragraph 82; Royal College of Nursing Institute, paragraphs 100-102].

22   More specifically, areas attracting favourable comment include: co-supervision systems; the provision of training for supervisors; arrangements for supervision off-campus; the systematic support provided for student progress; institutional policies for funding student attendance at conferences and other events [Bath Spa University College, paragraphs 85-86]; and the quality of student handbooks [The Manchester Metropolitan University, paragraph 94; Wimbledon School of Art, paragraphs 143-145; Royal College of Art, paragraphs 54 and 88] and associated staff handbooks [University of Surrey, Roehampton, paragraphs 81-82]. One institution is praised for the steps it has taken to achieve greater consistency of practice in supervision, including the introduction of a method of minuting supervisory meetings and 'a system of checks and balances…to promote an effective and responsive system' [London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, paragraphs 85-87]. In another report, the development of PDP for research students through a 'Graduate PDP' programme is identified as a feature of good practice. The report describes how this 'highly structured' programme has been reviewed, updated to take account of recent developments in skills training, and is highly valued by students [University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, paragraph 78].

23   The audit reports contain relatively few recommendations relating specifically to support for research students - a total of four recommendations in four reports. It should be noted, however, that this does not include recommendations that relate to support for graduate teaching assistants and research supervisors, which are covered in an earlier *Outcomes...* paper (see paragraph 3). One institution is advised to 'review, as a matter of priority, the University's arrangements for supporting postgraduate research students', as part of a wider recommendation relating to the postgraduate learning experience. The difficulties described include variation in the frequency of meetings between students and supervisors (with the onus placed on students to arrange meetings) and in the provision of feedback 'despite specific regulatory requirements in these areas'. There are similar recommendations in other reports, for example, for strengthening and systematising the provision of generic skills training for research students. In one such case, an institution was invited to clarify the roles of the various staff members, at departmental, faculty and college level, involved in the provision of support. Finally, it is suggested in another case, that the institution in question should ensure that research students are given clear information about their financial entitlements, including funding for conference attendance.

The provision of specialist services, including careers advice and PDP

24   It is evident from the audit reports that all institutions provide a range of specialist (normally central) services relating to student support; the menu of available services depends on an institution's particular ethos and mission. Many institutions have established professional units and centres that, amongst other things, provide welfare advice, careers advice, support for students with special needs, and support in the development of key skills including literacy, mathematics, computing and study skills. In a number of instances, the work of these units contributes to more general features of good practice in the area of student support. In relation to key skills, for example, attention is drawn to the work of several institutions and one institution is praised for its 'focused strategy for skills development' which includes development of generic modules in learning methods and career development and the 'systematic mapping of key skills in the undergraduate curriculum' [Writtle College, paragraph 102]. Similarly, several reports identify good practice in relation to support for students with disabilities [Aston University, paragraph 122; University of Surrey, Roehampton, paragraph 85; Writtle College, paragraph 113; University of Lincoln, paragraph 130] and institutional responses to the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Discrimination Act* (SENDA) [The Manchester Metropolitan University, paragraph 93; Royal Northern College of Music, paragraph 79]. One institution, for example, has developed a 'Code of Practice Concerning Special Assessment Arrangements for Disabled Students' [College of St Mark and St John, paragraph 107].

25   It appears that audit teams have judged specialist services to be particularly effective when they are delivered as part of a coherent framework, integrated with academic support mechanisms, and overseen by a coordinating group [Brunel University, paragraphs 128-129]. In one report, there is praise for the mechanisms in place for ensuring that the institution is made aware of, and provides resources to meet, the strategic needs of its specialist services [Loughborough University, paragraphs 136-140]. Another report comments on how the disability support service provides 'particularly effective support in the way that it integrates identification of the needs of individual students with the delivery of support mechanisms to meet those needs and with staff development to ensure that those support mechanisms work' [University of Lincoln, paragraph 130].

26   Many reports comment on institutional arrangements for providing students with advice and support in relation to their future careers. Some reports draw attention to effective links between the central 'Careers Service', or similar unit, and academic schools [University of East Anglia, paragraph 125; Kings College London, paragraph 132]. In respect of specialist institutions, several reports comment favourably on the work of the dedicated centres established to support students in their professional activities by, for example, finding them work and placements and continuing to provide advice and a network of contacts after graduation [Royal College of Music, paragraph 113; Royal Academy of Music, paragraph 98; Cumbria Institute of the Arts, paragraph 113; Royal Northern College of Music, paragraph 81]. Another report comments on the institution's development of a skills certificate, available to both undergraduate and postgraduate students, which provides 'a structured programme covering areas such as communication, career management and learning from work experience' [University of Warwick, paragraph 111].

27   In a limited number of instances, primarily involving specialist institutions, audit teams have recommended that further attention is given to aspects of careers support. One such institution, for example, was found not to offer any formal careers advice to students and is advised to give further attention to its approach to this area, 'in the context of the positive impact of its programmes on students' professional practice and career development'. It is recommended that a second institution, which has taken the view that a dedicated careers service was not appropriate to its particular context, gives further consideration to this approach. In another specialist institution, a team was informed by students that they had no specified entitlement to careers guidance and that provision varied between programmes. In this case, the report recommended that the institution should continue with its work to ensure adherence to the relevant section of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* and to ensure that 'systematic mapping and monitoring' takes place. It is suggested that another institution should strengthen the careers guidance available to students who do not wish to pursue careers within the professional field in which the institution specialises. Other (generalist) institutions are asked to ensure that their approach to careers education reflects, and is consistent with, the institutional mission and to develop the careers support available to part-time and postgraduate students.

28   Around half of the first 70 reports allude to the introduction of PDP as an element of academic and personal support, linked to the development of both subject-specific and generic skills and to careers guidance. In some institutions, it is evident that a form of PDP has already been introduced; in others, its introduction has been planned or is in progress. Only four reports are explicit that the institutions concerned need to be more proactive in moving towards the introduction of PDP. One report identifies as a feature of good practice the institution's proactive approach to the introduction of personal and academic development plans and in raising student awareness of them [University of Sheffield, paragraph 98; University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, paragraph 78]. Another report articulates the institution's view of the principal benefits of PDP: making students 'more aware of their achievements and their acquisition of generic skills, and that through being able to record and to articulate them more effectively their employability will be considerably enhanced' [The Open University, paragraph 118].

29   Two reports contain recommendations relating to the introduction of PDP. In one instance, it is noted that the PDP system that has been developed by the institution concerned is intended as an important means of monitoring student progress, to serve as a comprehensive record of student learning, and to provide the basis from which CVs and references can be compiled. However, the audit team found resistance to its introduction from staff and students, based not on the principles behind the scheme, but to the 'onerous task' of completing the associated forms and to the design of those forms. In this case, the institution is asked to consider the desirability of revisiting its implementation strategy. The second report indicates that PDP implementation and student participation has been variable across academic schools, a finding that contributes to a recommendation that is wider in focus: 'in order to ensure the equitable treatment of students', the report recommends that it should consider 'the extent to which variation in practice at school level is transparent and justifiable'.

The provision of information relating to academic and personal support

30 Most audit reports comment on the ways in which information about academic and personal support is made available to students. It is apparent that many institutions have produced clear and helpful written guidance about the services available and about student entitlements, often supplemented by internet-based information that is especially useful to part-time and off-campus students. One report draws attention to the development of a '24-7 website' which provides students with easily accessible information, including advice on a range of academic matters [Middlesex University, paragraphs 82 and 87]; another notes that an institution's coordinated approach to its central support services is complemented by provision of 'a comprehensive database informing students of all the opportunities offered by the different support services' [University of Leeds, paragraph 109]. In some cases, the information is targeted at specific student groups: one institution, for example, has produced a 'Survival Guide for Mature Students' [University of Sheffield, paragraph 102]. Other reports also comment favourably on the corresponding documentation produced for staff involved in student support, including codes of practice and handbooks for personal tutors.

31 In a limited number of cases, audit reports comment on perceived deficiencies in information relating to academic and personal support. One audit team found that an institution's handbooks were not always helpful in clarifying its complex systems relating to student support, and that the quality of the handbooks was variable between departments and faculties. In this case, the report recommends that the institution should continue 'to promote good practice in the production of handbooks as a reliable source of information for graduate and undergraduate students'. Another report draws attention to inconsistencies between the student handbook and internal codes of practices, and suggests that their co-existence could mean that important information is overlooked. Other reports suggest that the information provided about tutorial arrangements could be clearer and that it would be beneficial to ensure greater consistency in the presentation of subject-specific information in student handbooks.

The monitoring and review of academic and personal support systems

32 Finally, several reports comment specifically on institutional arrangements for monitoring academic and personal support systems, and for keeping the provision under review. Several reports draw attention to annual monitoring arrangements designed to ensure that support services 'respond to changing student demand' [University of Sheffield, paragraph 102], to mechanisms for systematic periodic review, and to a 'continuing commitment to further improvement, based on a responsiveness to student needs'. Some reports provide examples of developments that have taken place as the result of such reviews: in one institution, for instance, an internal audit of personal and academic tutor systems has recommended strengthening and formalising support mechanisms and has led to the re-establishment of a 'Student Affairs and Welfare Committee' to take an overview of all support services.

33 Where procedures for monitoring and review are found not to be in place, or are judged to be inadequate, this is the subject of comment. One institution, for example, is praised for its evaluation of student support provision but is advised to

'monitor more carefully the learning experience of postgraduate students, particularly on taught programmes', given the mixed and 'sometimes strongly negative view' of personal and academic support for postgraduates presented to the audit team by students. Another institutional audit report was unclear as to how the institution concerned 'currently gains a comprehensive overview of the quality of careers guidance', given the apparent absence of an appropriate monitoring mechanism. Other institutions are reminded of the need to be alert to the possibility that growth in student numbers could 'challenge the effectiveness of…existing systems' and therefore of the need to keep the level and quality of academic and personal support provision under review.

Conclusions

34   It is clear from the institutional audit reports published by November 2004 that institutions have established a wide variety of effective arrangements for the academic guidance, support and supervision of their students, and for providing them with appropriate personal support and guidance. There is much evidence of good practice in respect of general strategies for student support, in relation to student induction and the development of key skills, and in relation to the provision of specialist services and student information. There is also some evidence that the undergraduate personal tutoring systems that provide the basis for the provision of front-line academic support in many institutions do not always work as envisaged and that work is required, in some institutions, to ensure that the systems are clear and that they operate in accordance with institutional intentions, to ensure an equitable experience for students. In many cases, it is apparent that the difficulties identified are acknowledged by the institutions concerned and that action has been taken, or is in hand, to address them.

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

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 and All Saints College, May 2003

Trinity College of Music, 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	Publishing date (provisional)
Initial overview	April 2005
External examiners and their reports	April 2005
Programme specifications	April 2005
Staff support and development arrangements	October 2005
Student representation and feedback arrangements	November 2005
Programme monitoring arrangements	January 2006
Assessment of students	January 2006
Learning support resources, including virtual learning environment	January 2006
Validation and approval of new provision and periodic review	January 2006
Work-based and placement learning, and employability	March 2006
Arrangements for international students	March 2006
Progression and completion statistics	March 2006
Collaborative provision in the institutional audit reports	March 2006
Specialist institutions	July 2006
The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland	July 2006
Subject benchmark statements	September 2006
Arrangements for combined, joint and multidisciplinary honours degree programmes	October 2006
Institutions' work with employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies	October 2006
Institutions' support for e-learning	October 2006
Academic guidance, support and supervision, and personal support and guidance	October 2006
Institutions' frameworks for managing quality and academic standards	November 2006
Learning outcomes	tbc

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 compiled by QAA staff and experienced institutional auditors. 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.