QAA

Annual report to the Higher Education Funding Council for England

January 2012

Contents

1   Introduction

1.1   The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications, and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To this end, QAA carries out reviews of higher education provision in higher education institutions (HEIs) and further education (FE) colleges, on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

1.2   The contract between QAA and HEFCE for 2010-11 requires QAA to provide a detailed account of audit and review activity for the academic year 1 August 2010 to 31 July 2011.

1.3   The contract stipulates that:

'QAA shall by 31 January each year prepare and submit to HEFCE a report which:

a. Provides a summary and overview of all review activity undertaken by QAA during the preceding academic year. This will incorporate Institutional audit, mid-cycle follow-up, collaborative provision audit, IQER, handling Causes for Concern and any other programmes that may be specified in Part B.

b. Identifies, and provides commentary on, the main themes and trends arising from these activities, and the inferences that may be drawn from them about the state of, and trends in, quality and standards in higher education.

c. Provides commentary on relevant developments to the Academic Infrastructure.

d. For IQER, Institutional audit and mid-cycle follow-up, includes a "Report on Evaluations", being a report on institutions', contract reviewers', review co-ordinators', auditors' and (where applicable) subject specialist reviewers' evaluation of IQER, mid-cycle follow-ups and audit visits undertaken in the preceding academic year. As well as evaluating the process, the report should assess the effectiveness and value of the review method as it is perceived by the institutions reviewed as well as the reviewers, in relation to the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards.

e. Reports on examples of good practice in the provision of Foundation Degrees and the quality and standards of Foundation Degrees across the sector, gathered through the contracted review activity, primarily through IQER.

f. Distinguishes between different groups of HEIs and different groups of FECs, using such categories as may be relevant for the purpose.

g. Makes recommendations with a view to future action, by HE providers, QAA, HEFCE or other relevant parties, to sustain and improve quality and standards, and address any weaknesses.

h. Provides a summary and overview of quality enhancement activity undertaken with the sector and other relevant bodies, and the work of the QAA development and enhancement group.

i. Provides a summary of equality and diversity work within QAA.'

1.4   QAA's contract with HEFCE includes the activities of Institutional audit and Audit of collaborative provision, and the review of higher education provision in further education colleges through the Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER) method. In addition, QAA has responsibility for the development and maintenance of various UK-wide frameworks that underpin the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards within the higher education sector, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) (formerly the Academic Infrastructure).

1.5   Another significant area of QAA's work is support for the development and enhancement of the quality of provision in UK higher education. QAA promotes the understanding of academic standards and quality in UK higher education and the methods used for their assurance. This is achieved by developing within higher education and its stakeholders a shared understanding and acknowledgement of the basis and the validity of academic standards and quality, and the processes for their assurance and their reporting.

1.6   QAA has a role in responding to concerns raised by students, staff and other people and organisations about academic quality and standards. QAA will investigate concerns where it thinks these concerns indicate serious systemic or procedural problems.

1.7   Other aspects of QAA's work, such as Audit of overseas provision, the management of the Access to HE courses scheme, and applications for degree awarding powers and university title, are not referenced specifically in this report, although some generic issues arising from the full range of review activity are included. The report does not include reference to privately funded institutions that subscribe to QAA.

1.8   This is an evaluative report based largely on published information and internal QAA documents. It brings together data on the number of events conducted over the period with an overview of outcomes and a commentary on the method. In accordance with its established practices, QAA has conducted evaluations of its activities over the previous year, and the outcomes of these and selected quotations from participants are also included within this report.

Summary of audit and review outcomes

1.9   The overall outcomes of both audits and reviews are based on the measured peer evaluation of teams and reflect the overall assessment of all aspects of academic standards and quality. Specific areas for improvement are identified in the text of reports and monitored through the continuing engagements between institutions and QAA.

1.10   QAA conducted 27 Institutional audits during 2010-11 (see Appendix 1). Of these, five were hybrid audits and a further 10 Audits of collaborative provision were undertaken. All of the reports have been published. In 25 cases the audit team confirmed confidence in 'the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards' for on-campus provision. In two audits, a limited confidence judgement was offered for the likely future management of the academic standards.

1.11   Five hybrid collaborative provision audits were undertaken and 10 separate Audits of collaborative provision. The outcomes of Institutional audit are presented in Section 2.

1.12   2010-11 marked the final year of Institutional audit which will now be replaced by Institutional review (England and Northern Ireland) (IRENI). The final year of Institutional audit has confirmed the general commitment to quality in the majority of HEIs reviewed by QAA, as evidenced across the 27 Institutional audit reports conducted during the year (see Appendix 1).

1.13   Institutional audit has, however, highlighted some instances of limited confidence with regard to the management of collaborative arrangements in some HEIs. In November 2010, QAA updated its guidance on the management of quality and standards of provision delivered through partnership agreements, and will continue to develop guidance as part of the Quality Code.

1.14   During 2010-11, as part of the review of higher education colleges using the IQER method, 71 Developmental engagements and 75 Summative reviews were undertaken. Of the 75 Summative reviews, 74 resulted in a 'confidence' judgement for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. In only one of the Summative reviews, the review team concluded that reliance could not be placed on public information. The outcomes of IQER are presented in Section 3. There was much good practice identified within colleges through the 79 Developmental engagements and 66 Summative reviews. One college received recommendations for improvement through their Developmental engagement categorised as essential, and a further college received an essential recommendation through the Summative review process. The findings of the reviews are described in Section 3.

1.15   Evidence from Integrated quality and enhancement reviews conducted during 2010-11 indicates real progress in the establishment of secure arrangements for quality assurance in further education colleges that deliver higher education programmes. Our review reports suggest that good practice in managing academic standards and that understanding of the Quality Code amongst HE in FE providers is well embedded. This progress is such that Developmental engagements, which are conducted prior to a Summative review with the aim of developing capacity to manage quality assurance, have been deemed no longer necessary and will be phased out. This proposal had overwhelming support in our consultation for a new method to review higher education in further education colleges.

1.16   Across review methods, review and audit teams identified extensive good practice (871 examples) and made recommendations (923) to institutions and colleges in respect of areas for development or improvement (see Appendix 4). This demonstrates that while there is much good practice, there are areas where further work needs to be done. The tables below outline the percentage of examples of good practice and recommendations in relation to the different thematic areas.

Table 1: Features of good practice by review method (% total)
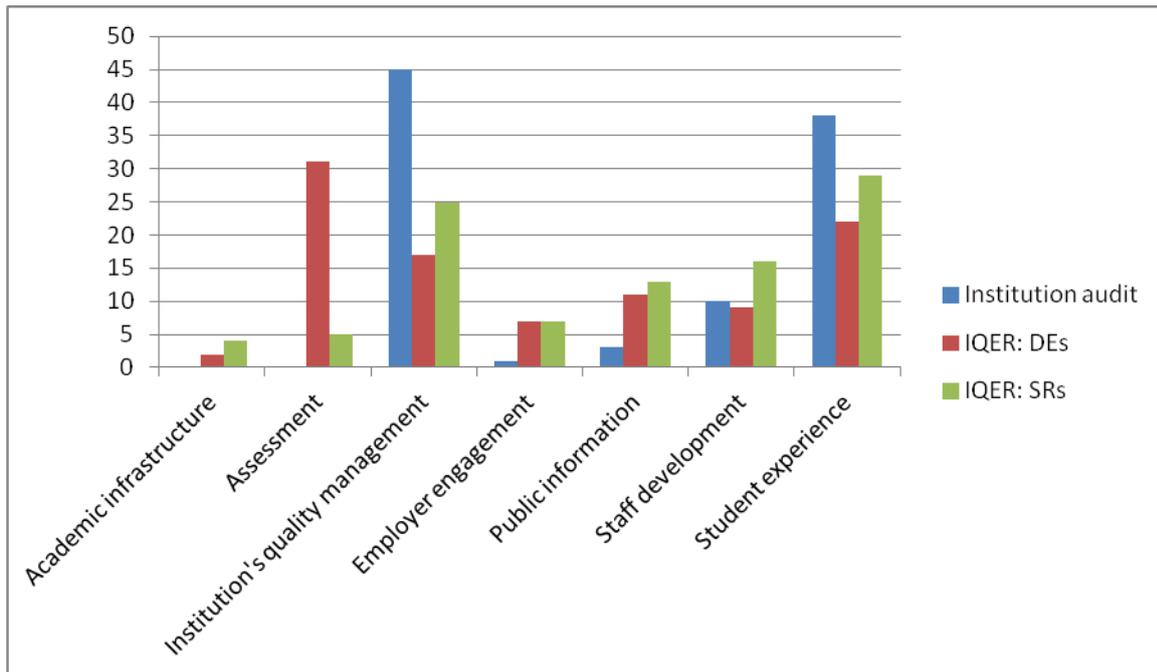
Table 2: Recommendations by review method (% total)
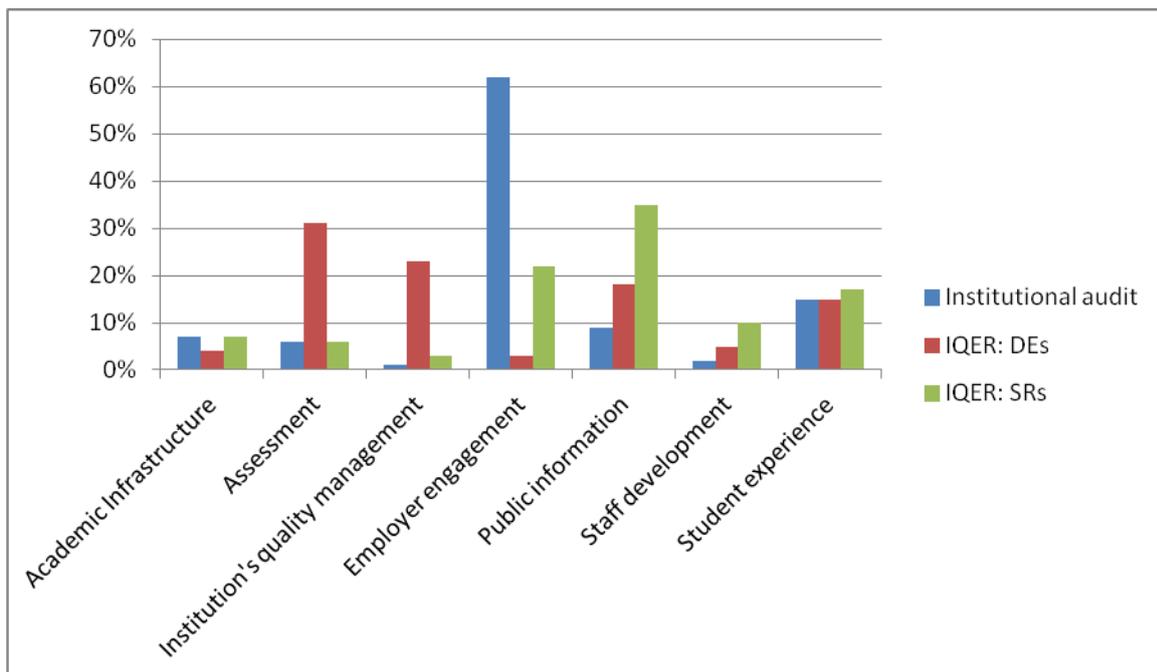
1.17 Through the evaluation of audit and review activities, QAA confirmed that those involved in the process as a reviewer or auditor, or a representative of an institution or college, considered that the method of review was fit for purpose and that the review had achieved its aim. Benefits of the audit and review activities were identified for institutions and students.

Information on reviewers

1.18   Information on QAA's reviewers is now published on our website, giving details of their employer institution, their highest qualification, and the institutions where they have conducted audits and reviews. See
www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/our-reviewers/Pages/default.aspx.

Student engagement

1.19   QAA has continued to promote student engagement and emphasise the centrality of students to quality assurance. This is clearly evidenced by the inclusion of students as members of audit teams and the role of students within the replacement to Institutional audit, Institutional review in England and Northern Ireland (IRENI). As well as student participation in reviews, students have attended a number of training events and workshops, and 42 students attended QAA's annual conference in June 2011. See Section 6 for more details on our work with students.

1.20   Student members of review teams have become a key part of our review process and provide a valuable additional dimension to discussions with institutions. This reflects QAA's continuing commitment to putting students at the heart of our work and of the implementation of our *Student Engagement Strategy 2011-14* (see Section 6).

UK Quality Code for Higher Education

1.21   In response to the evaluation of the Academic Infrastructure undertaken in 2009-10, QAA has developed proposals for revising and restructuring the Academic Infrastructure into the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). Proposed changes were subject to a public consultation which ran between 14 December 2010 and 1 March 2011. A final report providing an analysis and a summary of the responses, including recommendations and an outline format for the Quality Code, was published in June 2011.

1.22   A revised *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* was published in October 2010.

Concerns about standards and quality in higher education

1.23   QAA's Concerns about standards and quality scheme, launched in November 2010, continues to act as an instrumental mechanism for identifying and resolving issues of concern in UK higher education. Concerns can be raised by anyone - from students to external examiners - or identified through other QAA activity. Published findings of investigations into concerns raised, as well as the recommended remedial action to be taken by the institutions in question, are accessible on the QAA website. In the coming year, we hope to work with partners across the sector, and directly with students, to improve awareness of the scheme.

1.24   The investigation of concerns raised by students, staff and others about the standards and quality of higher education is a growing area of QAA's work. In 2010-11 QAA made minor changes to the remit, design and operation of the scheme in response to our experience of managing the scheme and developments in other areas, such as QAA's designation as an Educational oversight body for the UK Border Agency.

1.25   In 2010-11 QAA received 42 formal applications to the Concerns scheme, an increase of 18 on the previous year, with approximately 150 informal enquiries via telephone or email. It is envisaged that this will continue to be a growing area of QAA's work.

Organisational development

1.26   With QAA in its final year of its 2006-11 strategic plan, a new strategy for 2011-14 was developed. This identifies four strategic aims which will guide our work over this period:

- to meet students' needs and be valued by them
- to safeguard standards in an increasingly diverse UK and international context
- to drive improvements in UK higher education
- to improve public understanding of higher education standards and quality.

1.27   To ensure we are best placed to deliver these aims, QAA has strengthened its internal structure, with the establishment of the Public Engagement Group and the Research, Development and Partnerships Group.

1.28   QAA has also developed its first Single Equality Scheme, which was published in July 2011. The scheme includes an action plan for the next three years, and QAA will aim to embed equalities perspectives across all our activities.

The future

1.29   QAA is operating in a changing and challenging external environment. As part of the Interim Regulatory Partnership Group, QAA will be working closely with our partners to play a full part in the development of a new regulatory framework for higher education arising from the White Paper, *Higher education: Students at the heart of the system*, and the BIS Technical Consultation, *A new fit-for-purpose regulatory framework for the Higher Education sector*. This will involve the development of a risk-based approach to quality assurance.

1.30   QAA will continue to take steps to strengthen our capacity to address student and public concerns and complaints, to provide advice to government about Access to HE and supporting its aims to widen access and extend HE progression opportunities, and closer working generally with further education colleges and private providers, including the widening of our subscription base. QAA will consider the implications of these developments for its structures and governance, including widening membership of the Board to include additional student input, and to allow FE and private providers to have a voice in the governance of QAA.

2   Institutional audit

2.1   Institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework established in 2002 following revisions to the UK's approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

2.2   Institutional audit balances the need for publicly credible, independent and rigorous scrutiny of institutions with the recognition that the institutions themselves are best placed to provide stakeholders with valid, reliable and up to date information about the academic standards of their awards and the quality of their educational provision. Institutional audit encourages institutions to be self-evaluative, and is therefore a process that, in itself, offers opportunities for enhancement of institutional management of standards and quality.

2.3   QAA began the current cycle of Institutional audit in 2006-07. The method has been revised, following the recommendations of the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group (QAFRG) set out in HEFCE 2005/35. The *Handbook for Institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland 2009* documents the revised process, in particular the arrangements for including students as members of audit teams and revised arrangements for the Audit of collaborative provision. This is the last year that Institutional audit will operate.

2.4   During 2010-11, 27 Institutional audits were undertaken (see Appendix 1). Within this number, five hybrid audits (Audit of collaborative provision/Institutional audit) were carried out. In addition, 10 Audits of collaborative provision were undertaken. All Institutional audits and Audits of collaborative provision were subject to evaluation in accordance with normal QAA processes.

What we found

2.5   All 27 audit reports have been published. In 25 of the audits, the audit teams confirmed confidence in 'the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards'.

2.6   In all 27 audits the audit team confirmed confidence in 'the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students'.

Table 1: Institutional audit (2010-11)

	Institution's present and likely future management of academic standards and awards	Institution's present and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities
Confidence	25	27
Limited confidence	2	0

N=27
Notes: Includes five hybrid audits, excludes Audits of collaborative provision.

2.7   In respect of the 10 Audits of collaborative provision, one audit resulted in limited confidence in the management of academic standards and awards and in the management of the quality of learning opportunities. In the remaining nine audits, confidence was awarded in both areas.

Table 2: Audit of collaborative provision (2010-11)

	Institution's present and likely future management of academic standards and awards	Institution's present and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities
Confidence	9	9
Limited confidence	1	1

2.8   Through the 27 audits, 85 examples of good practice were identified.

2.9   The primary area of good practice identified related to the institution's quality management (40). Eighteen out of the 27 institutions had good practice identified in this area.

Table 3: Features of good practice

Area of good practice	Per cent
Assessment	3%
Institution's quality management	45%
Employer engagement	1%
Public information	3%
Staff development	10%
Student experience	38%

N=94

2.10   Examples of good practice identified in relation to the institution's arrangements for the management of quality and standards were primarily around enhancement and the policies and procedures in place for managing quality and standards. Examples included:

- the strategic approach to enhancement
- the commitment to enhancement, demonstrated through a reflective and self-critical approach
- the engagement of support services with their stakeholders in delivering on the institution's enhancement agenda
- the development and promotion of specific enhancement themes.

2.11   Other features of good practice identified in respect of the institution's quality management included:

- the development of comprehensive academic policies and regulations
- communication with staff to ensure a shared understanding
- the processes for programme approval and review and the subsequent monitoring of the action plans
- the accessibility of management information and the way it is used to inform planning and decision-making.

2.12   Thirty-one examples of good practice were recorded across 18 institutions in relation to the student experience. Around half of these related to the academic support students receive, and included examples of support specifically for postgraduate students and support provided through support services.

2.13   Seven examples of good practice were recorded across seven institutions in relation to staff development. Examples included the institution's strategic approach to staff development including scholarly activities and Continuing Professional Development opportunities.

2.14   Three examples of good practice in respect of public information were recorded. These related to the quality and accessibility of information and the benefits of the virtual learning environment.

2.15   Three examples of good practice concerning assessment arrangements, policies and practice were recorded.

2.15   Audit teams also made 190 recommendations for action by institutions. Of these, 96 were deemed advisable, 91 as desirable and a further three recommendations across three institutions were deemed to be essential.

Table 4: Recommendations for improvement

Area of recommendation	Per cent
Academic Infrastructure	7%
Assessment	6%
Employer engagement	1%
Institution's quality management	62%
Public information	9%
Staff development	2%
Student experience	15%

N=199

2.16   One hundred and nineteen recommendations were made across 27 institutions in relation to the institution's arrangements for the management of quality and standards. The primary areas were around strategies, policies and procedures relating to quality and standards, with 29 recommendations made across 16 institutions. Twenty-six recommendations were made in relation to internal review procedures and processes, and 22 recommendations were made regarding externality in quality management.

2.17   Recommendations regarding strategies, policies and procedures included:

- the development and implementation of clear procedures and processes
- ensuring mechanisms were in place for the dissemination of information and good practice.

2.18   Twenty-six recommendations were made across 17 institutions regarding internal quality review procedures, reports and evaluations; examples included recommendations to:

- review procedures and processes to ensure they are effective and efficient
- ensure processes are clear and explicit and are consistently applied
- ensure action plans are monitored and reported on.

2.19   Twenty-two recommendations were made across 14 institutions in relation to the role of the external examiner in quality management. Recommendations were primarily focused on the dissemination of external examiner reports to students and student representatives (9 recommendations).

2.20　　In respect of the recommendations focusing on the student experience, 29 recommendations were made across 15 institutions. Nine recommendations were made in relation to both student support and student feedback. Specifically in terms of student support, the nine recommendations were made by teams across six institutions. Of these, six related to the support and training that postgraduate students receive prior to undertaking their teaching role.

2.21　　Other recommendations made by the team focused upon:

- assessment policies and procedures (seven recommendations, five HEIs)
- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*) (six recommendations, five HEIs)
- the quality of published information (five recommendations, five HEIs)
- staff development (three recommendations, three HEIs).

2.22　　Where the audit team concluded that only limited confidence could be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards, the associated 'essential' recommendations included the following:

- ensuring that academic policies and processes are effective in securing academic standards of collaborative provision, and that there is systematic oversight of such provision including monitoring of compliance
- involvement of external advisers in the approval and monitoring of programmes, and effective oversight by external examiners of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

2.23　　Ten Audits of collaborative provision were additionally undertaken. Through these audits, 33 features of good practice were identified across all 10 institutions, and 74 recommendations were made. Thirty-one of the recommendations were advisable, 41 were desirable, and two essential recommendations were recorded.

2.24　　Emerging good practice focused upon:

- the institution's arrangements for the management of quality and standards (21) in relation to their work with partners
- public information in relation to quality and accessibility (six)
- staff development (four).

2.25　　Emerging areas of recommendation focused upon:

- the institution's arrangements for the management of quality and standards (46), including arrangements for internal review, reporting and monitoring, processes and structures, the use of management information, and effective risk management procedures
- the student experience (seven)
- public information (six)
- engagement with and implementation of the Academic Infrastructure (six)
- assessment (six)
- staff development (two).

Outcomes of the evaluations

2.26   In accordance with normal QAA practices, the audits were subject to evaluation.

Table 5: Responses to the evaluations (excluding Audit of collaborative provision)

Role	Sent	Received	%
Auditor	137	121	88%
Audit secretary	27	24	89%
Institution*	27	12	44%
Total	**191**	**157**	**82%**

*Evaluation questionnaire not sent until the report is published, so there is a delay between sending and return.

Table 6: Responses to the evaluations (Audit of collaborative provision)

Role	Sent	Rec'd	%
Auditor	47	38	81%
Audit secretary	10	9	90%
Institution*	9	3	33%
Total	**66**	**50**	**78%**

*Evaluation questionnaire not sent until report published.

2.27   Comments have been received from audit teams and higher education institutions involved in all types of audit. The majority of auditors and audit secretaries completed an evaluation questionnaire following their involvement in audits and 15 institutions have returned completed questionnaires (note: the questionnaire for institutions is not sent out until much later than the team questionnaire, in part accounting for the lower response rate). Overall the findings from the evaluations were positive, with audit teams and institutions agreeing that the audit had achieved its aims.

2.28   The number of respondents agreeing that the Institutional audit or Audit of collaborative provision achieved its aims was as follows:

- auditor - 147 out of 151 respondents
- audit secretary - 31 out of 32 respondents
- institution - 12 out of 14 respondents.

2.31   Responses to the evaluations indicated that audit teams and institutions were satisfied that the audit process, including the hybrid method and Audit of collaborative provision, had achieved its aim. There were, however, two areas highlighted by respondents where they felt that there was scope for improvement. The institutional briefing papers and student written submissions were not always felt to be as useful as they could be to the audit teams. For example, respondents felt that the briefing papers were not as useful as they might have been in describing the institutions' approach to quality enhancement or collaborative provision. All audit teams used the student written submission as part of their enquiries, where one was provided, but several were not felt to be sufficiently analytical or balanced and relevant. Although these areas have continually received the lowest number of 'good' or 'yes' responses on the evaluation questionnaires, there have been improvements made as the number of 'poor' or 'no' responses given has decreased.

2.32   Key findings from the evaluations are as follows:

- communication with and support from QAA is good

- first-time auditors and audit secretaries indicate that the *Handbook for Institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland 2009* is clear on the process as a whole and their roles within that process
- the training for first-time auditors and audit secretaries provides them with the necessary information and skills to undertake the audit
- institutions and team members agree that the process achieves its aim.

2.33   Respondents were asked to identify benefits for the institution as a result of the audit process. Representative comments included:

'Covers collaborative provision in a method that is proportional to the scale of provision.' (Refers to hybrid audit).

'It remains a 'health check' and can also alert the institution to areas of slight slippage in monitoring when all appears at first to be at least satisfactory…for collaborative, it does reinforce the need for comparability of standards and learning opportunities, access to staff development and student support mechanisms.' (Refers to hybrid audit).

'To help celebrate what has been achieved and build upon the good practice but also recognise consistencies across the institution. Areas for further consideration and development are highlighted to ensure standards are maintained and enhanced.'

'Hopefully to remove some complacency and make the institution think more critically about what it does.'

'It reassures the institution that their awards and qualifications are of an acceptable quality and academic standard. It also reassures them that good use is made of external reference points (including the *Code of practice*).'

'It helped focus the institution on resolving outstanding and ongoing quality and standards-related issues in a structured way.'

'In the case of a small specialist institute…the audit provides a health check in a manner which is not part of their usual business, and an opportunity to benchmark themselves against larger institutions.'

'Health checking and for this audit I think confidence-building as they have come a long way in a short space of time and it is useful for them to ensure they are on the right track.'

'A fresh pair of eyes on their processes to see if they are working as senior managers envisage.'

'It allows separate consideration of quality assurance arrangements which are specifically customised to mitigate the higher risks involved in collaborative provision.' (Relates to Audit of collaborative provision).

'Such an audit enables the institution to focus particularly upon its collaborative provision and enables a self-reflective process to be undertaken prior to the audit itself in a more focused way than is possible within the 'standard' audit. A positive collaborative audit report could also be useful to institutions in securing future collaborative partners.' (Relates to Audit of collaborative provision).

2.34   Respondents were also asked to identify benefits for students as a direct result of the audit. Typical benefits identified included:

> 'Opportunity for scrutiny of parity of provision between 'home' and partner provision.' (Relates to a hybrid audit).

> 'The team can ensure the institution addresses areas of significant concern that students may have in relation to standards and learning opportunities.'

> 'Opportunity to discuss their experience with externals. Opportunity to actively engage in the management of quality and standards. Ensuring that the student focus is not overlooked.'

> 'Offers an opportunity for the SU to air some grievances. Audit seems particularly important in research-intensive universities for supporting teaching.'

> 'Making their voice heard. Learning about how their institution prepares for such an audit and what they do to support students. Being supported by the audit to increase involvement in institutional processes.'

> 'Strengthening the institution's processes has benefit for the quality of the students' learning and the standard of their degrees - this applies particularly to collaborative provision students.'

> 'Those involved in the audit clearly found the experience informative and quite enjoyable. In the longer term it will clearly help the institution improve the students' experience.'

> 'Provides an opportunity to focus on the experience of students accessing collaborative provision.' (Relates to Audit of collaborative provision).

> 'Clear focus on issues relating to the student experience for those students in partners. Allows the voice of CP students to be explicitly heard.' (Relates to Audit of collaborative provision).

2.35   In addition, students who participated in the audit process were also invited to provide feedback on their experience. Following each audit, an evaluation questionnaire was sent to the Students' Union and the quality assurance contact at the institution for dissemination to those students who were involved in the process in some way. A total of 41 questionnaires were returned from students involved in audits at 12 institutions.

2.36   Respondents felt that the information provided to students by QAA was good and considered that the guide was detailed and useful. Students involved in compiling the submission made use of the events run by QAA and NUS and their websites to find out about student involvement in audit. Other sources of information used to find out more about student involvement in audit and preparing the student written submission were usually either talking to other students' unions and/or reading their submissions or information from their university.

2.37   In relation to the preparation of student written submissions, the main challenge identified was getting engagement from the wider student body. The most common method of data collection to inform the submission was existing data (for example, the National Student Survey (NSS) and institution surveys).

2.38   Most respondents believed that there would be improvements to the student learning opportunities at their institution as a result of the audit. A similar number of

respondents felt that changes would be made by the institution in response to the audit. Not all of those involved in the process necessarily felt that their involvement had strengthened existing connections and engagement with the institution as they felt they were strong already. However, several respondents indicated that being involved in the process had made them feel more confident in their dealings with the university.

2.39   Common benefits of Institutional audit identified by students themselves included:

'Sense of involvement. Opportunity to raise problems. Instigating beneficial change to current/future students.'

'Understanding where the institution is in the grand scheme of things and hearing points from different areas, not just my viewpoint or problems.'

'The opportunity to give hands-on information to auditors, which they will not hear from the staff at a university. To communicate where we see the fault lines are within our educational experience and to improve them for the future batch of students.'

'It means the university can know what some students are thinking, rather than guessing what students are thinking.'

'Having institutional audits are time-consuming for everyone involved, however it is reassuring for students because this is the time when institutional staff really have to scrutinise the practice of the university and of each course, and essentially focus on aspects that may have been overlooked previously. In regards to the student written submission aspect of the audit, it is a brilliant way of officially telling the university where students want to see change/improvement. When it is done in a formal process such as this it is more likely to be taken on board by the relevant staff.'

'Being able to give accurate information, judgements, a full picture of our institution and make recommendations. Being able to speak on behalf of so many people in our institution, hoping that the student experience continually improves.'

2.40   Helpful comments were offered by the students to improve student involvement in audit, both in terms of preparing the student written submission and meeting with the audit team as part of the visit. These included:

'More questionnaires distributed to students during the year.'

'More input from all student population - not just those already involved with the politics of the institution.'

'Being a smaller union, more resources would be a help to gather more student opinions.'

'Timing needs to be better considered to enable better student engagement. More of a briefing from the audit team on level/areas of questions for students.'

'Perhaps postgraduates and undergraduates should be met separately. Many questions were irrelevant for postgraduate study and postgraduate experience was not given much time for questions and the student perspective.'

'The meeting afterwards with the uni people seemed to be a check-up on what we had been asked by the panel which felt a bit intrusive.'

'Allow more time for student responses.'

Summary

2.42   Overall, the audits confirmed the high standards of higher education provision in HEIs within England. Extensive good practice was identified by audit teams. Likewise, teams identified areas for attention and/or development, making a series of recommendations for action to the institutions.

2.43   The evaluation confirmed that the audit process was working well in practice and had achieved its aims. All respondent groups identified multiple benefits for the institution and the students as a direct result of the audit process.

The future

2.47   In September 2011 the new institutional review process for higher education providers, Institutional review in England and Northern Ireland (IRENI), replaced Institutional audit.

3 Review of higher education provision in further education colleges

3.1   The overarching aims of Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER) are to:

- support colleges in evaluating and improving their management of their higher education, for the benefit of students, and within the context of their agreements with awarding bodies
- foster good working relationships between colleges and their awarding bodies, for the benefit of students
- enable HEFCE to discharge its statutory responsibility for ensuring that provision is made for assessing the quality of education provided by the institutions it funds
- provide public information.

3.2   IQER reports on three core themes: academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities, and public information. The review method involves two related processes: Developmental engagement and Summative review. The Developmental engagements have a development and enhancement focus. The report is not published but is made available to HEFCE and to the college and its awarding bodies. It is intended to aid the college in developing capacity to manage quality assurance. Summative review reports include judgements on the academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, and a commentary on public information. These are published on the QAA website. The outcomes are similar to Institutional audit so that public information is available in a similar form for reviews of higher education in both higher education institutions and further education colleges.

3.3   IQER is now in its final year of a five-year cycle. The reviews in this method will be completed by the end of the academic year 2011-12. Full details of the method may be found in *The handbook for Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review,* available on the QAA website.

3.4   During 2010-11, QAA carried out 71 Developmental engagements and 75 Summative reviews.

What we found

3.5   Of the 75 Summative reviews, all but one resulted in a judgement of confidence in academic standards. One other review resulted in a judgement of limited confidence in the quality of learning opportunities (table 1).

3.6   In 74 of the 75 Summative reviews, the reviewers concluded that reliance could be placed on public information. In one review the team considered that reliance could not be placed on public information (table 1).

Table 1: Outcomes of Summative reviews

	Judgement on academic standards	Judgement on quality of learning opportunities	Public information
Confidence	74	74	
Limited confidence	1	1	
No confidence	0	0	
Reliance			74
No reliance			1

(N=75)

3.7   Through the 72 Developmental engagements, reviewers identified 404 examples of good practice. Through the 75 Summative reviews, 382 examples of good practice were identified. Good practice was evident in every college reviewed. Within the context of IQER, good practice is defined as:

> Practice that the IQER team regards as making a particularly positive contribution to the college's management of academic standards and/or academic quality in the context of that particular college; and which is worthy of wider dissemination within and/or beyond the college.

3.8   As the Developmental engagements primarily focused on assessment, the majority of good practice examples and recommendations for improvement directly related to policies and practices associated with assessment (251 examples).

Table 2: Developmental engagements - features of good practice

Area of good practice	Per cent
Academic Infrastructure	2%
Assessment	31%
College quality management	17%
Employer engagement	7%
Public information	11%
Staff development	9%
Student experience	22%

N=404

3.9   Specific areas of good practice reported around assessment included:

- the arrangements for the provision of feedback to students on assessed work (50 examples in 38 colleges), primarily relating to the provision of formative feedback, as well as the quality and timeliness of feedback
- the arrangements for assessment and associated policies and processes in place within colleges (36 examples in 25 colleges)
- the arrangements in place within the college for assessment design, to include verification and approval (13 examples in 11 colleges), including the variety of assessment methods used and links to employers.

3.10   In respect of the student experience, 90 examples of good practice were identified through the Developmental engagements. Forty-eight references across 30 colleges were made in relation to student support for learning. Examples included the range of effective support mechanisms in place as well as the tutorial support provided. In addition, the processes in place to collect student views were identified as a feature of good practice in eight colleges (10 examples). Good practice examples focused on the range of mechanisms in place for gathering students' views as well as responses by colleges to the student voice.

3.11   Sixty-nine examples of good practice were identified around the arrangements and activities relating to the management of quality and standards within colleges. Twenty references were made regarding colleges' internal review arrangements for reporting and evaluation, which included good practice in relation to the robust and effective processes in place. Eighteen examples of good practice were identified in relation to collaborative working with awarding bodies (18 colleges). Relationships were considered to

be effective in enhancing the student learning experience. Fifteen examples across 12 colleges related specifically to the processes, procedures and strategies for managing higher education.

3.12   Forty-six examples of good practice were identified in relation to public information (34 colleges). Eighteen of these related to the quality and accessibility of handbooks for students and employers. Ten areas of good practice were identified in relation to the quality of published information. The information provided was considered to be informative and comprehensive. Seven examples of good practice focused on the virtual learning environment.

3.13   Thirty-seven examples of good practice in staff development were identified. These were primarily in relation to arrangements and activities that support standards, and included references to the opportunities provided for the sharing of good practice among staff and the range of development activities available.

3.14   Twenty-nine examples of good practice were identified regarding arrangements for employer engagement (18 colleges). These focused mainly on employer involvement in the design of the curriculum and/or assessments (11 examples in 9 colleges) and on links with employers (10 examples in 9 colleges).

3.15   Seven examples of good practice were identified in respect of the Academic Infrastructure (seven colleges), and focused on college engagement with the Academic Infrastructure.

3.16   In respect of the Summative reviews, 29 per cent of all features of good practice related to the student experience, and a further 25 per cent to the arrangements for the management of quality and standards.

Table 3: Summative reviews - features of good practice

Area of good practice	Per cent
Academic Infrastructure	4%
Assessment	5%
Employer engagement	7%
Public information	13%
College quality management	25%
Staff development	16%
Student experience	29%

 N=382

3.17   Through the Summative reviews, 382 examples of good practice were identified. The primary area of good practice related to the student experience. Within this area, 54 examples of good practice relating to student support were noted in 45 colleges. Examples included the well managed provision of academic and personal support provided to students, as well as the wide range of support arrangements available. A further 17 examples of good practice, identified in 16 colleges, related to the learning resources in place for higher education provision. Fifteen examples of good practice were identified in relation to the virtual learning environment and its use as a learning resource (14 colleges).

3.18   In 11 colleges, reviewers cited as good practice the student experience, which included the mechanisms in place for collecting student feedback. These were considered to be effective in leading to actions which resulted in improvements to the student experience which were also reported back to students.

3.19   In respect of good practice in the management of quality and standards through the Summative reviews, 27 examples (22 colleges) of good practice were identified in relation to the internal review processes, reporting and evaluations. These were considered to be rigorous and robust, ensuring effective management of provision.

3.20   A further 18 examples of good practice were identified in 16 colleges in relation to the policies and processes for the management of quality and standards.

3.21   In 11 colleges, 12 examples of good practice were noted in relation to the arrangements which colleges have for working with their awarding bodies. These were found to be productive and supportive, benefiting the learning opportunities for students.

3.22   Sixty-two examples of good practice related to staff development (47 colleges). Twenty-one of these were in relation to the development opportunities available to staff in order to support standards. An additional 13 examples were focused upon the teaching observation and peer review systems within colleges which provide a sound basis for improvement in teaching quality.

3.23   Forty-nine examples of good practice were also identified in relation to public information and focused particularly on the quality of the handbooks available to students and the accessibility of information.

3.24   Twenty-five examples of good practice were noted in relation to employer engagement and were primarily focused on the engagement of employers in the management of quality and standards.

3.25   A further 21 examples of good practice were identified in relation to assessment and 17 focused on the Academic Infrastructure, specifically around engagement.

3.26   Reviewers also make a series of recommendations for action by colleges. These recommendations are graded as desirable, advisable and essential, and are subsequently used to inform the college's action plan. Only one college received an essential recommendation in respect of a Developmental engagement. One college received an essential recommendation as a result of their Summative review.

3.27   Four hundred and seven recommendations were made in the 71 Developmental engagements. Of these, 280 (69 per cent) were classified by reviewers as desirable, and a further 126 (31 per cent) as advisable. Only one recommendation was considered essential.

Table 4: Developmental engagements - recommendations

Area of recommendation	Per cent
Academic Infrastructure	4%
Assessment	31%
College quality management	23%
Employer engagement	3%
Public information	18%
Staff development	5%
Student experience	15%

N=407

3.28   In total, 125 recommendations were made in respect of assessment (31 per cent). Many were in relation to the arrangements in place for providing feedback to students on their assessed work (54 recommendations in 39 colleges), and were primarily focused on the consistency in quality of feedback provided, the timeliness of feedback, and the development of formative feedback. An additional 38 recommendations within 28 colleges were made regarding the policies and processes in place for the management of assessment arrangements. These in part related to strengthening the management of assessment through further development of policies and processes and the promotion of effective assessment practice. A further 11 recommendations (10 colleges) were made in relation to the processes for marking student work. In the main these were in relation to procedures for second marking and for grading.

3.29   Ninety-five recommendations were made in respect of the arrangements for the management of quality and standards. Twenty-five colleges were recommended to improve and further develop their policies and strategies for managing higher education, including undertaking reviews of existing strategies. A further 18 recommendations related to externality, specifically in relation to reports from external examiners and how colleges respond to these.

3.30   Seventy-three recommendations were made in relation to public information (47 colleges). Twenty-seven were specifically in relation to programme and module handbooks, where it was recommended that further development on the content take place as well as ensuring consistency of the information provided. Fifteen recommendations were made regarding the accessibility of information and an additional 15 recommendations were in relation to the accuracy and currency of the information provided.

3.31   Sixty-two recommendations were made in relation to the quality of the student experience. Twenty recommendations were made in 16 colleges in relation to the academic support provided for students. These were quite diverse and included recommendations for further clarification and additional information regarding the support entitlements available to students. A further 12 recommendations (10 colleges) were made regarding the use made of the virtual learning environment, and included recommendations that colleges develop and encourage more extensive use of the virtual learning environment. Ten recommendations were made regarding the learning resources available to students on higher education programmes.

3.32   In total, 397 recommendations were made through the Summative reviews. Around two-thirds of these were classified as desirable, with only one recommendation for one college being deemed by reviewers as essential.

Table 5: Summative reviews - recommendations

Area of recommendation	Per cent
Academic Infrastructure	7%
Assessment	6%
Employer engagement	3%
Public information	22%
College quality management	35%
Staff development	10%
Student experience	17%

N=397

3.33   Thirty-five per cent of all recommendations made related to the arrangements for quality management within colleges. Fifty-nine of the 75 colleges reviewed received recommendations to improve their arrangements for quality management, with particular emphasis on the need to:

- develop and embed policies and procedures, and review existing ones to ensure they meet the needs of the college
- review and improve the arrangements for internal review and monitoring activities (to include process and reporting)
- evaluate and review the operation and effectiveness of committees, boards and other structures for the management of quality assurance, including reporting lines, terms of reference, and the monitoring of actions.

3.34   Twenty-two per cent of all recommendations related to public information. Particular reference was made to the consistency in the format of handbooks and the accuracy and currency of their content. Other areas for improvement identified through the recommendations focused on the need for colleges to ensure the accessibility and dissemination of information to students. In addition, recommendations included the further development of college virtual learning environments in relation to public information to encourage greater use by staff and students, as well as ensuring information held is current and accurate.

3.35   Seventeen per cent of recommendations made related directly to the quality of the student experience. Forty-three colleges received recommendations about the student experience. Reference was made to the use of virtual learning environments by students (16 colleges) and the academic support provided to students (12 colleges). In respect of virtual learning environments, recommendations included the need to:

- develop a clear strategy for the use and accessibility of the virtual learning environment ensuring students are aware of where information can be accessed
- continue the development of the virtual learning environment to support student learning and assessment
- ensure students are supported in the use of the virtual learning environment and that it is used effectively.

3.36   Recommendations about higher education learning resources focused primarily on ensuring that appropriate learning resources were available, particularly in relation to the provision of library resources and facilities. Additional recommendations regarding the student experience were in relation to the mechanisms for collecting student feedback (10 colleges), and included recommendations to develop more systematic methods for gathering and analysing feedback from students.

3.37   There were 40 recommendations for 27 colleges to improve staff development. The recommendations focused primarily on the development and implementation of staff development activities to support standards, and recommendations on improvements to the peer observation process.

3.38   Twenty-seven colleges received recommendations regarding their use of the Academic Infrastructure. Recommendations focused on the need to:

- raise awareness and understanding of the Academic Infrastructure among staff
- engage with and make more explicit the use of the Academic Infrastructure in developing policies and procedures
- align and map policies and procedures with the Academic Infrastructure.

Outcomes of the evaluations

3.39   Table 6 provides an overview of responses in regard to Developmental engagement. In general, the IQER Developmental engagement process was well received by awarding bodies, principals and students. Ninety-two per cent of (all) respondents agreed that Developmental engagement had achieved its aim. Typical comments on the process are positive, using terms such as 'clear', 'supportive', 'helpful', 'valuable', 'worthwhile' and 'well structured'. The few negative comments received were to do with timing and information overload beyond the direct control of QAA. All respondent groups identified a series of benefits for the college, the awarding bodies and students as a direct result of IQER.

Table 6: Developmental engagement response rates by respondent group

Respondent group	Questionnaires sent	Number returned	Response rate
Awarding bodies	218	110	50%
Reviewers	72	64	89%
Nominee	128	92	72%
Coordinator	71	47	66%
Principal	71	38	54%
Total	**560**	**351**	**63%**

3.40   The majority of nominees, reviewers and coordinators completed an evaluation questionnaire following their review. Around half of awarding bodies and principals responded. The overall response rate was 63 per cent, which is an improvement on the previous year's 58 per cent. This is largely due to principals having been asked to respond on behalf of colleges (53 per cent response rate) and respondents having a better understanding of the process. The 2011 report indicated that just 35 per cent of colleges responded, as it had been felt that nominees were expressing the views of colleges within their evaluation responses.

3.41   Table 7 shows the percentage of respondents by respondent group that agree the Developmental engagement achieved its aim, with 2011 figures given in brackets. Awarding body agreement decreased from 86 per cent to 76 per cent, and those that did not respond 'Yes' responded 'Don't know'. An apparent reason for this was that some awarding body respondents felt unable to answer the question until they had received the draft Development engagement report, and this was not available at the time of the survey. Reviewer agreement increased from 73 per cent to 98 per cent. Reasons for this included better understanding of the process and coordinator training, which assisted coordinators to give clearer direction to reviewers.

Table 7: Percentage of respondents that agree that the Developmental engagement achieved its aim

Respondent group	Per cent agreement
Awarding bodies	76% (86%)
Reviewers	98% (73%)
Nominee	98% (97%)
Coordinator	100% (98%)
Principal	97% (93%)

3.42   Benefits to colleges included:

- enhanced quality and improved student experience
- engaging staff in improving teaching, assessment, retention, and progression
- critical reflection and sharing of good practices
- improvement of processes and a sharpened focus on higher education provision
- critical review of work practices, policies and procedures
- further intra-organisational and inter-organisational partnerships
- better understanding of the *Code of practice*
- preparation for Summative review.

3.43   Benefits to awarding bodies included:

- strengthening partnership-working
- identification of staff development requirements and opportunities
- increased reputational status of academic partners
- facilitating contribution to colleges' enhancement processes
- enabling concerns and issues to be raised
- comparisons across organisations
- further external confirmation that college standards and procedures are robust
- opportunities to share best practices.

3.44   Benefits to students included:

- enhanced provision resulting from the process
- the chance to offer independent feedback
- engagement with colleges' quality assurance
- an opportunity to provide feedback on experiences
- confirmation of the importance of student views and chance for a student voice
- a platform for critical review
- discussion of issues with students from other subject areas
- consideration of learning opportunities and facilities.

3.45   Table 8 provides an overview of responses in regard to Summative review. There was much positive comment about the benefits of interaction with reviewers. As per Developmental engagement, 92 per cent of (all) respondents agreed that Summative review had achieved its aim. All respondent groups identified a series of benefits for the college, the awarding bodies and students as a direct result of IQER.

Table 8: Summative review response rates by respondent group

Respondent group	Questionnaires sent	Number returned	Response rate
Awarding bodies	212	121	57%
Reviewers	205	176	89%
Coordinator	75	51	68%
Principal	75	45	60%
Facilitator	55	46	84%
Total	**622**	**439**	**71%**

3.46   The majority of participants completed an evaluation questionnaire following their review. Around half of awarding bodies and principals responded. The overall response rate was 71 per cent, which is an improvement on the previous year's 63 per cent. Again, this is largely due to principals having been asked to respond on behalf of colleges (60 per cent response rate) and respondents having a better understanding of the process. The 2011 report indicated that just 39 per cent of colleges responded, as it had been felt that facilitators may have been expressing the views of colleges within their evaluation responses.

3.47   Table 9 shows the percentage of respondents by respondent group that agree the Summative review achieved its aim, with 2011 figures given in brackets. Awarding body agreement increased from 73 per cent to 80 per cent, and those that did not respond 'Yes' responded 'Don't know'. This may again be related to timings of draft reports. Coordinator agreement increased from 91 per cent to 98 per cent. Reasons for this included better understanding of the process and coordinator training.

Table 9: Percentage of respondents that agree that the Summative review achieved its aim

Respondent group	Per cent agreement
Awarding bodies	80% (73%)
Reviewers	97% (97%)
CR	98% (91%)
Principal	91% (94%)
Facilitator	97% (100%)

3.48   Benefits to colleges included:

- facilitation of improvements in processes and therefore in the student experience
- external benchmarks for performance and opportunities to discuss issues relating to the student experience
- sharing of best practice
- identification of areas in need of further work
- an enabler for reviewing and maintaining quality collectively
- a driver for the involvement of senior management
- confirmation of reputation as higher education providers
- confidence in quality processes through critical reflection.

3.49   Benefits to awarding bodies included:

- closer working relationships with colleges, assisting in influencing improvements to quality assurance processes.
- gaining deeper insight into colleges
- external view of systems and processes and how they support the delivery of a high quality student experience
- highlighting positive aspects that could be disseminated across other partners
- reiterating the importance of close liaison between awarding bodies and their college partners
- emphasising that higher education provision has some different requirements from other college provision
- continual improvement
- ensuring colleges are doing what is expected by the awarding body.

3.50   Benefits to students included:

- opportunity to raise concerns that have not been adequately addressed
- feeling part of the process
- knowledge that programmes have been independently assessed
- evidence of external oversight
- public recognition that the award is of the correct standard and is of value
- improvement in the quality of learning opportunities
- opportunity to have a conversation with outside practitioners who have knowledge of the challenges for students in other provision
- awareness that higher education in colleges is being taken seriously.

3.51   Challenges identified through engagement and review included the following.

For colleges:

- limited resources, given the constraints of further education programme delivery
- overload of information and timing of events
- understanding the IQER process, particularly how it differs from other sector quality processes
- time to implement the changes suggested in the action plan before the Summative review
- time needed by staff to attend training sessions
- production of the portfolio of evidence, which was very time-consuming
- managing IQER alongside Ofsted and other inspection requirements at further education colleges
- ensuring that proposed actions are implementable and sustainable, and that they really are a part of continual improvement rather than just a paper exercise project that is completed and forgotten.

For students:

- understanding what is happening in the processes
- writing a representative and evaluative student written submission
- time, given other commitments
- being available in late June after teaching had finished
- finding time to attend meetings if in full-time work and attending college part-time
- feeling intimidated in a meeting with four reviewers
- feeling lack of commitment due to uncertainty that the process will achieve anything
- being new to the college and not being able to comment fully as a result.

For awarding bodies:

- insufficient face-to-face time to articulate procedures that are complex yet underpin interactions between colleges and higher education
- to ensure that the college receives relevant documentation in a timely fashion and that they are informed about formats and processes
- scheduling representation at meetings and general resource limitations
- not really knowing how much involvement is expected by colleges and QAA
- significant commitment of staff time
- the two stage process - a single stage would be preferable
- the balance between the costs and benefits of the process
- understanding the role the review panel wish the awarding body to take during the process.

4 Foundation Degrees

4.1 Foundation Degrees were introduced in September 2001 to enable students to develop the intermediate higher level skills that characterise the high quality graduates needed by the labour market. The qualification is located at level 5 on *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), published by QAA.

4.2 Foundation Degrees were also introduced to contribute to widening participation by providing an award that aims to attract learners who may not previously have considered studying for a higher level qualification. Many programmes are designed to meet the needs of local employment markets, although some are targeted at national and international employment needs.

4.3 The specification of Foundation Degree programmes was drawn up initially by the former Department for Education and Skills and has been codified by QAA in its *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* (2004). This provides details of the scope, structure and organisation of Foundation Degree programmes, including the involvement of employers and opportunities for work-based learning. The statement also identifies the need for progression routes from Foundation Degrees to awards at level 6.

4.4 Partnership between employers, higher education institutions (HEIs), further education colleges, and Sector Skills Councils are central to the concept of Foundation Degrees. QAA recognises that, while many Foundation Degree programmes are delivered by a consortium of institutions, some are provided by only one institution which may also be the awarding body.

4.5 The primary responsibility for the academic standards and quality of the students' learning experience rests with the awarding higher education institution. Where the higher education institution is in partnership with a further education college, the college and employers are normally partners in the delivery of a Foundation Degree, and share responsibility for the delivery and the quality of the students' learning experience with the higher education institution; but the ultimate responsibility for academic standards rests with the awarding HEI.

4.6 To date, QAA has conducted two special reviews of Foundation Degrees since their introduction in 2001; the first in 2002-03 and the second in 2004-05. Following the reviews, QAA published a report entitled *Learning from reviews of Foundation Degrees in England carried out in 2004-05*. The report identified a variety of examples of emerging good practice, and made a series of recommendations for the design, delivery and assessment of Foundation Degrees for consideration by providers and policy makers.

4.7 In autumn 2009, QAA provided a bespoke report to HEFCE on quality and standards in Foundation Degrees. This was supported by a QAA Information Bulletin published in summer 2010, reporting on emerging good practice and areas for improvement, as identified through IQER reviews.

- ***Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER) - Foundation Degrees***
  This Information Bulletin provides an overview of the standards and quality of Foundation Degrees based on findings from our Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER) activities during 2007-08 and 2008-09: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Integrated-quality-and-enhancement-review-information-bulletin-Foundation-Degrees-.aspx.

What we found

4.8   The contract between QAA and HEFCE for 2010-12 requires QAA to gather information through review activity on the extent to which Foundation Degrees meet their intended purpose. IQER is the primary method of review through which this information has been collected.

4.9   Foundation Degrees are explicitly considered within IQER Developmental engagements and Summative reviews. These provide a useful source of information to explore the arrangements in place within colleges. In order to report on Foundation Degrees, conclusions have been extracted from published review reports.

4.10   Each of the published Summative review reports offered a discrete section about Foundation Degrees. Two of the reports identified that the college did not offer Foundation Degrees. In one further college, the one Foundation Degree delivered had only recently enrolled students, and it was therefore too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the college's management and delivery of this programme.

4.11   In the majority of reviews (71), it was reported that the good practice and recommendations identified in respect of Foundation Degrees were broadly the same as those identified in respect of the rest of the college's higher education provision. In four reports, examples of good practice and/or recommendations were reported by the review teams specific to the provision of Foundation Degrees. See Section 3 for a summary of features of good practice and recommendations identified in colleges in respect of their higher education provision.

4.12   Excluding those areas of good practice or recommendations that related to higher education provision in general within the colleges (including Foundation Degrees), 12 examples of good practice specifically relating to the delivery of Foundation Degrees were cited across four colleges.

4.13   Good practice in the provision of Foundation Degrees covered a range of areas. Good practice relating to the processes and procedures within the college for the management of quality and standards included the effective analysis of actions taken in response to comments from external examiners, rigorous internal monitoring procedures, and the effective working relationships with partner universities and partnership networks.

Table 1: Foundation Degrees - features of good practice

Feature of good practice	Number
Academic Infrastructure	1
Assessment	1
College quality management	3
Employer engagement	2
Staff development	2
Student experience	3

N=12

4.14   Areas of good practice were identified in relation to the student learning experience. These included good practice in relation to the support provided to students and the process in place for collecting and responding to student views and opinions. Reviewers also identified effective staff development and training opportunities within colleges and good

practice in how colleges interact with employers to inform curriculum design and enhance students' work-based learning opportunities.

4.15   Reviewers also identified scope for the improvement and further development of Foundation Degrees. Through the Summative review reports, 19 recommendations were made specifically related to Foundation Degrees. Of the recommendations, 12 were considered advisable and the remaining seven were desirable. There were no essential recommendations.

4.16   Recommendations specifically related to Foundation Degrees focused primarily upon college quality management (seven). In respect of college quality management, areas for improvement included the need to improve and address the policies and strategies in place, as well as strengthening relationships with awarding bodies and implementing more formal procedures for conducting meetings.

Table 2: Foundation Degrees - recommendations

Recommendations	Number
Academic Infrastructure	1
Assessment	2
College quality management	7
Public information	3
Staff development	2
Student experience	4

N=19

4.17   With respect to the student experience, recommendations included the need to ensure a consistent approach to the development and use of the virtual learning environment, and for action to be taken in response to students' perceptions and expectations.

4.18   In respect of public information, recommendations specific to Foundation Degrees focused upon improving the accuracy and consistency of published information, particularly with reference to handbooks.

4.19   The evidence from IQER to date indicates that Foundation Degrees are generally well designed and fit for purpose. The evidence from the reviews indicates that programmes continue to be developed in new and innovative disciplines reflecting local and regional employer needs, and also in growth sectors of the economy. The development of Foundation Degrees has continued to strengthen colleges' links with employers and between colleges and their higher education partners.

4.20   The reviews concluded that the arrangements for managing and ensuring the quality and standards of the Foundation Degrees in the institutions reviewed are operating successfully. The commentary on Foundation Degrees in review reports indicates the unexceptional nature of programmes in that Foundation Degrees continue to be well established as part of the suite of higher education awards.

Foundation Degree awarding powers

4.21   The two colleges which applied for Foundation Degree awarding powers in 2008-09 became the first to be granted the powers in summer 2011. The detailed scrutiny which began in autumn 2010 is continuing and another application, which was received in spring 2011, has proceeded to the detailed scrutiny. It is anticipated that the former will come to report in summer 2011 and the latter in the following academic year.

Summary

4.22   The QAA review activities in respect of the discharge of responsibilities through institutional review of higher education for England and Northern Ireland and IQER provide a rigorous approach to the assurance of the quality and standards of Foundation Degrees. On the basis of the outcomes of review activities, QAA recommends that the quality and standards of Foundation Degrees continue to be monitored through existing review mechanisms and, where appropriate, specific reference be made to such provision within reports.

The future

4.23   QAA will also continue to monitor the recommendations arising from the *Learning from reviews of Foundation Degrees in England carried out in 2004-05* report, through the remainder of the IQER cycle and through Institutional review of higher education for England and Northern Ireland. Foundation Degree awarding power scrutinies can provide an additional source of evidence to support and inform ongoing analysis and monitoring.

4.23   Given the current range of activities for monitoring the delivery of Foundation Degrees and for promoting the enhancement of provision, including the contribution of employers, QAA does not see the need for further special reviews of Foundation Degrees at this stage. The outcomes from the various review activities have confirmed that existing external and internal review and verification processes are effective and widely used. QAA will continue to evaluate provision through its existing review processes, and disseminate findings through bespoke publications.

5   Development and enhancement

Introduction

5.1   This section provides a summary and overview of quality enhancement activity undertaken with the sector and other relevant bodies including a commentary on relevant developments to the Academic Infrastructure, including in 2010-11 its proposed redevelopment into the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), and identifies some of the highlights and key themes that have come from the work during 2010-11. It also provides an indication of some themes that may be of particular relevance/importance in the following year.

5.2   The summary identifies the particular strengths and values of the work in this area where the work contributes to QAA's key strategic priorities both in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and internationally.

Main roles and responsibilities

5.3   The main roles and activities in development and enhancement are linked to QAA's responsibility for the stewardship of the UK-wide reference points for academic standards, quality and enhancement (formerly known as the Academic Infrastructure), and include:

- review and revision of the UK-wide reference points, to ensure their currency and applicability to evolving and emerging practice in higher education
- providing events and publications, mostly for the higher education sector, to support and promote the UK-wide reference points and their effective implementation
- working with stakeholders to ensure that the UK-wide reference points are understood and used effectively
- undertaking special projects to identify effective quality assurance practices, and support their evolution and innovation; this is done through work both in the UK, Europe and internationally.

5.4   While the reference points for academic standards, quality and enhancement are applicable across the UK, this report is concerned primarily with activities undertaken in England. All of QAA's development and enhancement work is interrelated; there are several ways in which linkages can be demonstrated, and as examples a few 'cross-cutting themes' are identified and summarised.

5.5   While QAA's main responsibilities in development and enhancement and some aspects of planning timeframes are predictable, much of our work in this area is also about responding to requests, recognising and creating opportunities, promoting discussions that can identify improvement, and working in partnership, often to other organisations' deadlines. The work is informed by latest developments and is proactive.

Supporting and enhancing quality

5.6   During 2009-10 QAA undertook an evaluation of the Academic Infrastructure to reflect on its use, impact and effectiveness. This drew on feedback from higher education professionals, students and other stakeholders. It considered whether the Academic Infrastructure:

- met and continued to meet its original expectations and anticipated benefits
- remained relevant and 'fit for purpose'

- was sufficiently flexible to accommodate future developments in higher education.

5.7 In response to the findings of the evaluation, QAA developed proposals for revising and restructuring the existing Academic Infrastructure into the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). This would incorporate all the components of the existing Academic Infrastructure alongside some new elements. These proposed changes were subject to a public consultation which ran between 14 December 2010 and 1 March 2011.

5.8 A final report providing analyses and a summary of the responses to the consultation and recommendations about the future development of the Academic Infrastructure was published in June 2011. The report provides an outline format for the Quality Code, a migration matrix showing how existing information will be incorporated into the Quality Code, and a protocol for how the detail will be developed, revised and maintained in the future. The report also set out in detail the programme of work QAA will undertake to implement the changes, beginning in 2011-12.

5.9 Specific programmes of review and updating individual elements of the existing Academic Infrastructure continued in 2010-11, alongside the major evaluation of the Academic Infrastructure and the consultation on future changes, and the development of the Quality Code. For example, a revised *Code of practice*, *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* was published in October 2010. Three benchmark statements were updated or revised, one new statement was published, and new statements in counselling and psychotherapy, forensic science, and veterinary nursing are being developed. We developed, for consultation, draft guidance on the characteristics of doctoral study and degrees. That guidance, and the QAA/NUS guide to the UK doctorate, were published in September 2011.

5.10 With the agreement of Ofqual and our partners across the UK and in the Republic of Ireland, QAA has taken over responsibility for the maintenance of the '5 countries' leaflet, *Qualifications can cross boundaries - a rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland*. During 2010-11 this was updated to reflect referencing of the frameworks in the five countries of UK and Ireland to the FQ-EHEA and/or the EQF, as appropriate and updates within various national qualifications frameworks.

5.11 One hundred and seventeen audit and review reports (Institutional audit and review, Enhancement-led institutional review, Institutional review (Wales), Audit of collaborative provision, and IQER Summative reviews) were published in 2010-11, as well as 38 reports and case studies arising from the overseas audits in Malaysia and Singapore. We also prepared 66 IQER Developmental engagement reports, and 13 mid-cycle (England and Wales) 'one year on' (Scotland) reports. Lessons learnt and sharing of good practice from these various audit and review activities was achieved by publishing the final two *Outcomes from Institutional audit: Series 2* papers, the first two papers in the *Outcomes from Institutional audit: Series 3*, 10 papers in the *Outcomes from Collaborative provision audit* series, *Learning from ELIR 2003-07,* the first two *Outcomes from IQER* papers, and one HE in FE Information Bulletin. The format and scope of the next iteration of *Learning from ELIR* reports has been agreed.

Offering expertise

5.13 We worked closely with our key partners in England to contribute to the development of the Key Information Set (KIS) and the public information aspects of the quality assurance system in England and Northern Ireland. The Institutional review method in England and Northern Ireland will include from 2011-12 a judgement on institutions' provision of information. In August 2011 we published guidance and practical advice for institutions on explaining to their students how 'contact hours' are managed. Information about 'contact hours' will appear in each KIS. The guidance for institutions was accompanied

by a student guide to understanding contact hours in higher education.

5.14   We work closely with students and their representative organisations. We publish information that is targeted at potential students, current students and their representatives. We are actively engaged in a variety of training and briefing events such as the 'Quality matters for students' programme with the NUS, and work with the NUS Union of Students in Ireland (NUS-USI), NUS Scotland, NUS Wales, individual students' unions and the Association of Managers in Students' Unions (AMSU). We also work with the Wales Initiative for Student Engagement (WISE) to support student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement activities in Wales, and with sparqs (student participation in quality Scotland), the student development service in Scotland.

5.15   QAA's student engagement strategy has UK-wide priorities and country-specific action plans, and a new strategy was presented to and approved by the Board in March 2011. This reflected the progress QAA has made in this area and the higher level strategic commitment to promoting student engagement and involving them in our work. QAA has developed good working relationships with the main sector bodies to collaborate on and promote student engagement, and we were represented on the UUK-NUS Student Charter Group. We presented QAA's student engagement work at a number of conferences throughout 2010-11. We have continued to invest in this area, most recently through the appointment of two Student Engagement Coordinators. For the first time, students were invited to attend QAA's 2011 Annual Conference, and played an important part in the event's success.

5.16   We have commissioned students to draft some of the new guidance on Institutional review in England and Northern Ireland. We have reached broad agreement with NUS on three collaborative projects to be undertaken in 2011-12: a survey of undergraduates' views on the student experience; events and materials to support student engagement in QAA processes and institutional processes; and bespoke support for HEIs to develop more effective strategies for student engagement in quality.

5.17   Students are members of Institutional review and audit teams in all parts of the UK. The QAA Student Sounding Board reports periodically to the QAA Board. During the year we introduced routine reporting of review judgements in QAA news, and have opened up discussions about permitting our subscribers to use the QAA logo, both to provide public information and promote QAA's work, but also to give institutions the benefit of being able to promote the fact that they have had a successful Institutional review/audit.

5.18   We have continued to invest in and strengthen our multimedia approach to public communication including webcasts, podcasts, Twitter, YouTube, iTunes, and short videos posted on our website. Using the full range of contemporary communications media is one way to improve our communications, particularly with students. We also redeveloped and relaunched our website in July 2011. One of the project criteria was to achieve clearer communication with students and the public, and we used extensive external testing to help us understand audience requirements. In July 2011 QAA also became an official supporter of the *Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research*.

5.19   In England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI), the annual liaison conference in July 2011 was fully subscribed - with delegates from HEIs, FECs, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) and the Higher Education Academy Subject Centres attending. In addition to representatives from HEIs , invited speakers included a representative from the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council - with presentations focusing on developments in HE and quality assurance. The conference enabled HEIs to share their experiences of using *Outcomes* papers and thematic reports to enhance their provision, for QAA to launch *Outcomes: Series 3*, and for QAA to gain feedback on additional approaches and services to support quality enhancement that the sector would like us to develop.

5.20   We have continued to strengthen employer links, whether through liaison with the UK Inter-Professional Group (UKIPG) and bodies such as the Confederation of British Industry, Institute of Directors and the Engineering Council, or through employer involvement in QAA working groups, roundtable meetings and conferences. We are involved in the work of the Council for Industry and Higher Education (and our Chair is a member of its Council) and other business/education interests, including Lifelong Learning Networks. We are members of the HEFCE task force set up to support employer engagement and a partner in the relevant employer network in Scotland.

5.21   In September 2011, negotiations were concluded for the transfer of functions (and in one case, a member of staff) for maintaining and developing aspects of the work previously carried out by fdf (which was wound up as an organisation in July 2011) and the Higher Education Empirical Research (HEER) database previously managed by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI).

5.22   Following discussions with the UK Border Agency (UKBA) we developed educational oversight (EO) review methods that are available to private providers of HE to help them meet one aspect of the UKBA's requirements for the grant of Highly Trusted Sponsor (HTS) status (without which providers will be unable to sponsor overseas students to study in the UK). We held a fully subscribed conference in July 2011 (350 delegates) and opened for applications later that month, with a closing date of 9 September 2011. The majority of the EO reviews will take place in the calendar year 2012. While QAA has worked with private sector institutions for many years, this development brings an opportunity for QAA to widen its involvement within that sector and for privately funded institutions to demonstrate publicly their commitment to standards and quality.

5.23   QAA is a member of the UKBA Joint Education Taskforce and has liaised extensively with the UKBA to avoid any unnecessary accreditation burden for QAA's subscribers arising from the UKBA's requirements.

Rationalising regulation

5.24   QAA was a signatory to The Higher Education Regulation Review Group (HERRG) Concordat. The Concordat brought together funding, data collection, auditing, and professional bodies, including QAA, which each made 'regulatory' demands on HEIs. It was a means to ensure that regulation was better coordinated and managed. We are now working closely with HERRG's successor, the Higher Education Better Regulation Group (HEBRG). The White Paper *Higher Education: Students at the Centre of the System* gave a specific brief to HEBRG to 'look across this complex [regulatory] landscape [in HE] to identify areas for deregulation while still safeguarding students and taxpayers'. In Access to HE we completed a joint project with the Data Service to rationalise data collection from colleges.

5.25   One of the ways in which QAA can contribute to better regulation will be through collaborative work with PSRBs. We reviewed our memoranda of cooperation with three PSRBs during the year. The QAA-UKIPG Forum is well established: it met twice in 2010-11, discussing among other things the new Institutional review method in England and Northern Ireland; the evaluation of the Academic Infrastructure and development of the Quality Code and consequent changes; the PSRB perspective on academic standards; the work of HEBRG; progress with the HEAR; implications of the White Paper; and international matters. The White Paper looked to the PSRBs 'to engage actively with the QAA to help reduce overlap and burdens on institutions'.

5.26   In 2010-11 QAA and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) established a 'Joint Operations Group' to identify opportunities for more effective partnership and collaborative working, in order to avoid duplication of effort and resources and to maximise the impact of

activities undertaken by each organisation for the benefit of the HE sector and its stakeholders. We are working closely with the HEA to revise QAA's subject communities liaison scheme in light of the Academy's restructuring of its subject centre network. QAA staff also contributed to a variety of shared working groups and Special Interest Groups and were involved in joint presentations on, for example, assessment and employer engagement. Some elements of the follow-up work arising from the thematic enquiries project (2009) were undertaken in collaboration with HEA (for example, aspects of the review of external examining) and have informed the development of the Quality Code.

Working worldwide

5.27   QAA is an active member in three of the international networks for quality assurance: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN). We have good working relations with several other European agencies and, through the vice presidency of one of our assistant directors at ENQA, are involved in several projects which will report to the next biennial meeting of ministers responsible for higher education in the European Higher Education Area (the Bologna Process). QAA is one of the funders of the UK HE International Unit and a member of the UK Bologna Experts and Stakeholder groups.

5.28   We maintain close contact with colleagues at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the devolved government departments with responsibility for international education. The Chief Executive is a member of the International Education Advisory Forum, chaired by the Minister of State for Higher Education, and QAA is a stakeholder in the UKIERI and UK China PIE cooperation programmes. We were invited to join a ministerial delegation to India in November 2010 and of the UUK delegation to the Pearl River Valley in March 2011. We continue to provide an external evaluation of a three-year EC-funded project on quality assurance and enhancement in language teaching.

5.29   We have strengthened our capacity to report, advise and brief the sector and partner bodies on European and other international developments. The Quality Update International newsletter (11 issues per annum) is now published on the QAA website and is well established as a means of providing international news from the world of quality assurance and HE. We have readers from around the world including in intergovernmental organisations such as the World Bank.

5.30   We continue to implement our strategy for the quality assurance of UK transnational education (TNE) with the establishment of a project team for TNE China 2012 review. Alongside a new approach for gathering and analysing data and intelligence on UK provision in China, we are working on the extension of the TNE strategy to cover foreign provision in the UK for UKBA licence purposes, and the development of a transnational certification scheme that could succeed the current overseas audit model.

5.31   We received 26 parties of international visitors between 1 August 2010 and 31 July 2011. This compares with 45 visits in 2009-10. Several planned visits with delegates from China and Russia were cancelled or postponed as delegates did not manage to obtain visas in time to come to the UK. There were 202 individual visitors and 93 different organisations from governments and universities, representing 13 different countries. The parties of visitors came from: Australia (3), Azerbaijan (1), China (5), Hong Kong (1), France (1), Iceland (1), Japan (6), Kuwait (1), Montenegro (1), New Zealand (1), Russia (1), Saudi Arabia (3), and Syria (1). The meetings/visits were held in Cardiff (2), Glasgow (2), Gloucester (5), London (16), and Oxford (1). We received requests from two subscribing institutions to provide briefings for their visiting delegations on continuing education courses. We have noticed an increasing number of requests for briefings to be given in London due to time and financial constraints which have cut short the length of visits to the UK and put

pressure on the timetables and itineraries for visits.

5.32　　Presentations were given at international conferences and events in Belgium, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, the Philippines, the UK, and the USA. We were commissioned to provide training sessions in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia on skills for reviewers, in association with the local quality agency or relevant government body and the British Council.

6   Our work with students

Strategic direction

6.1   QAA is working to ensure that all students get the best possible educational experience. We support universities and colleges as they aim to meet and shape students' expectations and enhance the learning opportunities available to them. We are committed to communicating clearly to students about standards and quality, and to working with them as partners. We are also responding to the views and diverse needs of students and will protect their interests.

6.2   The first stated strategic aim in our *Strategy 2011-14* is to 'meet students' needs and be valued by them'. In July 2011 we launched our *Student Engagement Strategy 2011-14* to ensure this ambition is achieved. The four main aims are:

> **Aim 1:** To ensure that all our activities have a positive impact on the student experience**.**

> **Aim 2:** To actively engage students as a primary stakeholder community in shaping and developing quality assurance and enhancement activities**.**

> **Aim 3:** To communicate effectively with students so that they recognise and are reassured by QAA.

> **Aim 4:** To promote the concept of the 'engaged student' as an important driver for enhancement in institutions.

6.3   We have continued our extensive work in relation to students and student involvement in our activities. We are developing new and innovative ways of engaging students, and in March 2011 the Board agreed to continue and build upon this work. Specifically, we have made further progress in these areas:

- direct interaction with student representatives
- student participation in our reviews
- developments and innovations in student engagement
- an expanded relationship with the National Union of Students (NUS).

Direct interaction with student representatives

6.4   QAA hosted a number of training events and workshops with significant student involvement:

- 38 students attended a workshop introducing them to quality assurance at NUS' Delivering Change event
- 35 students were trained as part of our Periodic Review Skills events
- 18 students attended a training session in quality assurance at NUS' 'The Big Welsh One'
- 15 students attended a workshop about doctoral degree characteristics at NUS' Postgraduate Students' Conference
- 30 students attended a workshop to gather feedback on the guidance we are developing on the management of international students' experiences at the NUS' International Students' Conference

- 10 students attended a roundtable discussion held in support of the consultation about the changes to the Academic Infrastructure
- 33 students took part in the redesign of our website.

6.5 Other events and meetings with student involvement included the following:

- 103 students attended Quality Matters for students, the national conference that we hosted with NUS
- 25 students attended two meetings of our Student Sounding Board
- 42 students attended our Annual Conference.

6.6 QAA also employed three graduates on placement during 2010-11.

Student participation in audit and review

6.7 Student participation in Institutional audit and Institutional review (England and Northern Ireland) (IRENI) was as follows:

- 14 lead student representatives (LSRs) were briefed
- Two students worked with QAA to author the four student guides to IRENI
- 32 student written submissions (SWSs) were submitted
- 82 students were recruited to our pool of student reviewers
- 17 students were trained to review institutions under the new IRENI and Institutional Review in Wales methods.

6.8 Student participation in IQER was as follows:

- One student reviewer presented at our Review Coordinators' Conference
- 27 students attended our IQER student conference
- 42 student representatives were briefed
- 99 student written submissions (SWSs) were submitted.

6.9 We have produced four student guides to Educational oversight to explain to students this substantial new area of our work.

Developments and innovations in student engagement

6.10 The Board has agreed in principle to increase its student representation to two student members, subject to consultation with the company members.

6.11 We have established a list of student contacts. This gives details of self-nominated students at universities and colleges who are happy to receive and disseminate our briefings about student consultations, policy documents and invitations to our student-focused events. Over 150 students have signed up.

6.12 We have continued to build our Twitter presence (@QAAtweets) among students. We now have over 1000 followers, many of whom are students.

6.13 To date, we have published 54 podcasts. Collectively, there has been a total of 28,956 single downloads of the mp3 files.

6.14 We now have a 'critical student network' with 20 members to consult on project work.

An expanded relationship with the National Union of Students

6.15   In the latter part of 2010-11 we planned three major projects in partnership with the National Union of Students (NUS), amounting to an investment on our part of £218,000 in student engagement. These are as follows.

Project 1: Research on the student experience
NUS has previously carried out research on the student experience funded by HSBC (2008-11). The aim of Project 1 is to expand on the knowledge gained through the HSBC research and other surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS). Data will be gathered through an online survey, supplemented through focus groups held nationally and an online discussion group. In addition to the main report, four mini-reports will be produced on different subjects, the first of which will be available in February 2012. The main report will be presented at the NUS National Conference in April 2012, and there will be a Parliamentary launch in the same month.

Project 2: Ensuring student-centred quality assurance
Project 2 aims to develop student engagement with quality assurance processes and reviews of higher education. This will be achieved through the development of training materials for course representatives, briefings, support, and materials to support Students' Unions engaging with Institutional review. There will also be national networking and training events for course representatives and Students' Union staff on specific quality processes. In addition, this project will include the annual Quality Matters conference and a follow-up event mid-year.

Project 3: Bespoke support for Students' Unions
The aim of Project 3 is to build the involvement of Students' Unions that do not have a tradition of engaging with quality issues and processes. The project will work with 16 self-nominated Students' Unions who will receive bespoke consultancy support to help them develop student engagement in quality processes. A key role of this consultancy will be to promote cooperation between the Students' Union and the institution. Case studies on student involvement will be collected from these 16 Students' Unions and also from at least two new and non-traditional institutions. The project will develop national guidance and support materials on how to develop strong student involvement, and will involve research on why Students' Unions find it hard to engage in debates about quality.

7 Feedback and evaluation from other activities

7.1 During 2010-11, QAA undertook the evaluation and monitoring of the various audit and review activities and training and briefing events. All evaluation and monitoring activity took place in accordance with QAA's evaluation policy and strategy. This section provides an overview of feedback from, and the evaluation of, QAA's activities and events.

7.2 QAA is committed to reflecting on its processes by undertaking a formal evaluation of all its audit and review activities. Evaluation serves a variety of purposes, not least of which is reporting to HEFCE and other stakeholders as part of QAA's contractual requirements. The systematic evaluation of activities allows for the identification of good practice and highlights aspects of activity where there is scope for further development as part of the process of continuous improvement.

7.3 The continual monitoring and internal reporting on evaluation activities has provided a valuable mechanism for the early identification of good practice and problems, so facilitating early resolution. QAA is confident that participant groups are broadly satisfied that the audit and review processes, and training and briefing events, have achieved their intended aims and met the expectations of those involved.

Process evaluations

7.4 Following the completion of all review and audit activities, formal evaluation was undertaken by means of questionnaire surveys. The evaluation involved all relevant participant stakeholder groups - student representative bodies, institutions and reviewers/auditors.

7.5 Across all methods, response rates were high and feedback was highly positive. On the whole, respondents agreed that the review/audit activities had met the stated aims and had benefits for the institution, and subsequently the student learning experience. In Institutional audit, 97 per cent of respondents agreed that the audit had achieved its aim. Over 90 per cent of all those involved in IQER agreed that the review had achieved its aim. The remaining respondents stated that they did not know.

Evaluation of other activities

7.6 During 2010-11, QAA ran a number of training and briefing events, and a wide range of conference, discussion and dissemination events. Examples of activities run by QAA included:

- reviewer training
- Annual Conference
- Annual Liaison Conference
- focus groups as part of review and audit method evaluation
- review and method-specific conferences, supporting reviewers' and auditors' continued professional development
- events aimed specifically at students and student representatives
- thematic conference events with an emphasis on the dissemination of pertinent information
- discussion forums with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies
- IRENI review team training pilot
- events with NUS.

7.7   All conference, training and briefing events delivered by QAA are subject to evaluation, so facilitating a reflective approach to both content and delivery. The continuous cycle of evaluation of events has ensured that any areas identified by respondents as requiring further attention or provision of information can be addressed by future events.

7.8   Feedback given through the evaluation questionnaires from all training and briefing events and conferences was overwhelmingly positive. Particular reference was made by delegates to the format of delivery, content of events, and the overall usefulness of the events.

7.9   Over 185 delegates attended the Annual Subscribers Conference at the East Midlands Conference in Nottingham on 30 June 2011. The theme for the day was 'Is there a public interest in higher education?', with a keynote address from Professor Mary Stuart, Vice Chancellor of the University of Lincoln. The conference was well received by delegates, who were very positive in their feedback.

7.13   During July 2011, QAA hosted the Seventh Annual Liaison Conference. The theme of the conference was 'Sharing outcomes, enhancing practice'. The conference coincided with the launch of the third series of *Outcomes* papers. It aimed to provide delegates with an opportunity to hear how *Outcomes* papers have influenced and shaped enhancement projects and to think about how they might be used in their own institutions. It also featured a perspective from an international speaker, and considered a range of alternative approaches to the dissemination of outcomes, exploring how these might be used to maximise the value and use of reviews in the future.

7.15   QAA has continued to work with other organisations to ensure that pertinent information is disseminated in a timely and accessible format to a variety of audiences.

Summary

7.16   QAA continues to deliver a variety of external events with the primary aim of disseminating information about specific aspects of QAA work or providing training for those involved in the work of QAA. As confirmed by the current and previous evaluations, such events are well received by those who attend them in terms of their content, organisation, delivery, and usefulness.

7.18   QAA continues to use a range of online materials in the form of podcasts and short films to exploit the opportunities of the internet as a tool for consultation and dissemination. Not only does the use of such media and other technology increase accessibility to resources and information, they also help to minimise the impact of QAA activities on the environment, while ensuring that information is disseminated appropriately. QAA has increased the use of podcasts and short films to share information with those unable to attend events. QAA has also made use of online survey software to run consultations and gather feedback from events and post-review.

7.19   In relation to environmental and financial sustainability, and accessibility to QAA, greater emphasis has been placed upon video conferencing and the use of wider information and communications technology (ICT) to support meetings with stakeholders and other review and audit activities.

8 Concerns about academic standards and quality

Introduction

8.1 The Causes for Concern scheme allowed QAA to investigate concerns about the standards and quality of higher education courses provided by institutions in England or Wales that subscribed to us. This included courses that our subscribers provided in collaboration with other organisations, such as further education colleges, in the UK and overseas.

8.2 The scheme was introduced in England in 2007 following discussion and agreement with the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, previously the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, and the Higher Education Funding Council for England. A similar scheme was introduced in Wales in August 2008.

8.3 The scheme was formally relaunched in November 2010 as the 'Concerns about standards and quality scheme' and the changes announced to institutions and other stakeholders in a circular letter.

Activity in 2010-11

8.4 In 2010-11, QAA received 42 formal applications to the Concerns scheme, an increase of 18 on the previous year. In addition we received approximately 150 informal enquiries via the Public Engagement Group's telephone enquiry hotline or to the scheme's email address. This report does not consider these informal enquiries, though QAA does record the details of these enquiries for possible future reference. We also refer enquirers on to other organisations, such as the Office for the Independent Adjudicator, as appropriate.

8.5 Of the 42 applications received in 2010-11:

- 40 related to institutions in England and two to institutions in Wales
- all were from individuals (including staff and students); none were from organisations
- 31 related to higher education institutions funded by HEFCE, 10 to private providers, and one to a further education college.

8.6 Of the 42 applications, 30 did not proceed to an initial inquiry either because:

- the applicant could or would not submit evidence to substantiate their allegations
- the concern fell outside the remit of the scheme
- the concern was already under investigation by another body
- the applicant failed to respond to correspondence, such as requests for further evidence.

8.7 Eight applications led to an initial inquiry, all of which related to higher education institutions funded by HEFCE (although two of these focused primarily on privately funded provision). Six of these cases ended at this stage (that is, they did not proceed to a full investigation) while two are still ongoing.

8.8 Where an application to the Concerns scheme is received within nine months of a scheduled review visit to the institution concerned, we may investigate the matter within that review. There was one application that fell into this category in 2010-11 and this also related to a higher education institution funded by HEFCE. In this case the Institutional audit team was asked to pay particular attention to the institution's management of disabled students'

learning opportunities. The team held dedicated meetings with staff and students and concluded that confidence could be placed in this area of the institution's management. The audit report was published on the QAA's website in July 2011.

8.9　　The three remaining applications proceeded to full investigation. Two of these investigations - of the University of Plymouth and the University of the Arts London - were of institutions funded by HEFCE. Both investigations upheld the original concerns in part and both institutions are committed to remedial action designed to ensure the problems identified do not reoccur. QAA kept HEFCE apprised of these investigations through the relevant regional consultant.

Revisions to the scheme

8.10　　QAA made several minor changes to the remit, design and operation of the Concerns scheme in 2010-11 in response both to our experience of managing the scheme and to developments in other areas, such as QAA's designation as an Educational oversight body. In summary, these changes are:

- an expansion of the remit of the scheme to include organisations that have applied to QAA for Educational Oversight (meaning that the scheme's jurisdiction is now higher education institutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that subscribe to us; courses provided by these institutions in collaboration with other providers; Access to HE courses; and organisations that have applied to QAA for Educational oversight)
- the publication of a dedicated guide for institutions undergoing an initial inquiry or full investigation
- the publication of a dedicated guide for external examiners wishing to bring concerns to our attention, in response to Chapter B7 of the new Quality Code
- the introduction of a more detailed follow-up procedure for institutions found by a full investigation to exhibit shortcomings in their management of standards, quality and/or public information.

8.11　　More information about the Concerns scheme is available on QAA's website: www.qaa.ac.uk/Complaints/concerns/Pages/default.aspx.

9   Equality and diversity

Introduction

9.1   QAA is committed to equality and diversity and this commitment is reflected in the contract for services with HEFCE.

9.2   Although QAA does not fall within the list of public bodies identified by the Equality Act 2010, it is still keen to comply with the requirements and wants to proactively promote equality of opportunity and good relations between different diversity groups, encourage participation of all diversity groups in QAA's work, and eliminate unlawful discrimination.

Single Equality Scheme

9.3   In 2008, QAA's Executive Committee endorsed proposals to develop a Single Equality Scheme (SES), which would apply to QAA as an employer and as a service provider through its work with the sector and other stakeholders in order to actively promote good practice. Detailed work on the development of an SES began in early 2010, and the final version was endorsed by the Board, and then published, in July 2011. The Scheme and its associated action plan is available on our website at www.qaa.ac.uk/AboutUs/corporate/Pages/Single-Equality-Scheme.aspx.

9.4   QAA collects information for monitoring the recruitment and deployment of QAA staff and auditors and reviewers. QAA has reported annually on ethnic monitoring for staff, reviewers and auditors since 2004-05 and reports are published on our website. Equality information is collected during the recruitment process; for auditors and reviewers this is captured on the central database (QMIS), and for QAA staff it is collected by the Human Resources team. The SES contains baseline data on the composition of QAA staff and of our reviewer pool.

9.5   Annual monitoring and analysis of staff and of our pool of reviewers has been identified as a key component of our Single Equality Scheme. We will produce annual updates to the SES which record progress in achieving our goals in this area. The first such annual update is expected to be published around July 2012 and will be included in the 2011-12 annual report to HEFCE.

Outcomes of monitoring

9.5   In considering the outcomes of the monitoring activity, QAA's direct employees (staff) are considered separately from auditors and reviewers.

Reviewers and auditors

9.6   As reviewers and auditors are not direct QAA employees, QAA has no formal policies regarding grievance or disciplinary procedures relating to them. Formal procedures exist in respect of recruitment, selection and allocation to reviews and audits. Auditors and reviewers are recruited to a pool of individuals and subsequently allocated to reviews and audit activities. They are allocated to reviews and audits using specific criteria, which includes experience and subject specialism. Training is a prerequisite to undertaking activity on behalf of QAA, therefore all auditors and reviewers will have completed specific training modules. Additionally, QAA invites all auditors and reviewers to participate in feedback events, and further details on feedback received during 2010-11 are provided elsewhere in this report.

9.7 During the academic year 2010-11, QAA received applications from 524 individuals to undertake review or audit work. From this pool of 524 applications, 370 were successful and were appointed.

9.8 Due to the small numbers in each category, the data has been aggregated to white, other and unknown. From an analysis of all applications it was found that:

- 91 per cent of applicants stated their ethnicity as white
- 5 per cent gave an ethnicity as 'other'
- 4 per cent did not provide ethnicity information.

9.9 An analysis of all those appointed for review or audit work found that:

- 91 per cent of those appointed stated their ethnicity as 'white'
- 5 per cent of those appointed stated their ethnicity as 'other'
- 4 per cent of those appointed did not provide ethnicity information.

9.10 Following the recruitment process, individuals are held as part of a pool, from which they are subsequently allocated to an activity. Individuals may remain within the pool indefinitely, and within any given year be used for multiple or no activities. Allocation to an activity is based upon a series of predefined criteria to include activity type; experience; availability; conflict of interest; and subject specialism.

- During 2010-11, 631 individuals were held in the pool.
- 1 per cent stated that they were from an ethnic group other than white.

9.11 During 2010-11 a pool of 346 individuals were involved in 213 separate review/audit-related activities. It should be noted that one individual may have undertaken a number of review/audit-related activities and therefore within the total of 213 activities an individual may appear more than once.

9.12 Not all individuals appointed during the 2010-11 period may have yet been involved in any review/audit activities. Additionally, those individuals involved in audits/reviews during 2010-11 may have been appointed during a previous period.

9.13 As individuals can apply for multiple roles, they may have been counted more than once. Therefore, data is presented relating to the 346 individuals deployed (at least once) and the 213 activities that were undertaken.

9.14 Eighty-two per cent of activities were undertaken by those who classified their ethnicity as white. Seventeen per cent of activities were undertaken by those who did not provide information regarding their ethnicity.

Staff

9.15 During 2010-11, 225 applications were made for employment with QAA (15 posts, excluding internal posts).

- Equal opportunities information was available for 195 of the 225 applicants.
- Nineteen per cent of applicants for which information was available described their ethnicity as other than 'white'.

9.16 For the 15 posts, 67 candidates were invited for interview. However, not all applicants provided information about ethnicity.

- Equal opportunities information was available for 52 of the 67 candidates invited for interview (15 posts).
- Of the candidates invited to interview for which information was available, 12 per cent described their ethnicity as other than 'white'.

9.17   There were 17 new employees recruited during 2010-11, including recruitment to internal posts. Due to the relatively small numbers involved, QAA does not externally report on the demographic characteristics of starters.

9.18   During 2010-11, 31 staff ceased employment with QAA. Again, due to the relatively small numbers involved, QAA does not externally report on the demographic characteristics of leavers.

9.19   During 2010-11, 163 staff were employed by QAA. This figure is based on head-count and includes full-time and part-time employees. In addition, the figure also includes all staff employed by QAA during 2010-11 and includes all new starters and leavers during the period.

9.20   Ninety-three per cent of staff described their ethnicity as 'white' and seven per cent as other than 'white'. Due to the relatively small numbers, no data is available in respect of categories of ethnicity other than 'white'.

9.21   Of the 163 staff employed, 86 undertook formal training during 2010-11. The number of training sessions undertaken by staff ranged from one to nine. More than 92 per cent of staff, who were trained, undertook between one and five training activities. A total of 272 individual training sessions took place across 59 separate training events over the 12 months. Eight per cent of staff who were trained and for which information was available described their ethnicity as other than 'white'.

9.22   Due to the small numbers involved, which may lead to the identification of individuals, it is not possible to publish information on the basis of race in relation to:

- performance appraisals
- grievances
- disciplinary action
- termination of service (for whatever reason).

References

Handbook for Institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland 2009
www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Handbook-for-Institutional-audit-England-and-Northern-Ireland-2009.aspx.

The handbook for Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review
www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/The-handbook-for-Integrated-Quality-and-Enhancement-Review.aspx.

Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER) - Foundation Degrees
www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Integrated-quality-and-enhancement-review-information-bulletin-Foundation-Degrees-.aspx.

Complaints and concerns
www.qaa.ac.uk/Complaints/concerns/Pages/default.aspx.

Single Equality Scheme
www.qaa.ac.uk/AboutUs/corporate/Pages/Single-Equality-Scheme.aspx.

Strategy 2011-14
www.qaa.ac.uk/AboutUs/strategy11-14/Pages/default.aspx.

Appendix 1: Institutional audit

Institutional audit, including hybrid (2010-11)

Birmingham City University
Kingston University
London Metropolitan University
Norwich University College of the Arts
Oxford Brookes University
Queen Mary University of London
Sheffield Hallam University
St Mary's University College
University of Bolton
University College Plymouth St Mark & St John
Writtle College
Courtauld Institute of Art
Heythrop College
London School of Economics & Political Science
Newman University College, Birmingham
Royal Northern College of Music
University of West London
University College Birmingham
University of Cumbria
University of London
University of Manchester
University of Worcester
Royal Holloway
St George's Hospital Medical School
The Arts University College at Bournemouth
University of London International Programmes
York St John University

Audit of collaborative provision (2010-11)

University of Kent
University of Portsmouth
Middlesex University
University of Greenwich
University of Derby
Open University
University of Hull
University of Sunderland
University of Westminster
Leeds Metropolitan University

Appendix 2: Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER)

Developmental engagements (2010-11)

Accrington and Rossendale College
Berkshire College of Agriculture
Bexhill College
Bournemouth and Poole College
Bromley College of Further and Higher Education
Bury College
Central Bedfordshire College
Chesterfield College
City College Brighton and Hove
Cleveland College of Art and Design
Craven College
East Riding College
East Surrey College
Farnborough College of Technology
Furness College
Hartpury College
Hull College
Liverpool Community College
New College Nottingham
North East Worcestershire College
North Lindsey College
Northampton College
Northbrook College Sussex
Northumberland College
Oaklands College
Orpington College
Peterborough Regional College
Plumpton College
Preston College
Redbridge College
Richard Huish College
Sandwell College
Selby College
South Birmingham College
South Nottingham College/Castle College Nottingham
Southgate College
St Helens College
Stanmore College
Stockport College of Further and Higher Education
Stratford-upon-Avon College
Strode College
Sussex Coast College Hastings

Sussex Downs College
The College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London
The Manchester College
Totton College
Trafford College
Great Yarmouth College of Further Education
Lowestoft College
Otley College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Suffolk New College
West Suffolk College
Uxbridge College
Wakefield College
Waltham Forest College
Weston College
Worcester College of Technology
Yeovil College
City of Westminster College
City of Wolverhampton College
Cornwall College
Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College
Eastleigh College
K College
Kirklees College
Lambeth College
North East Surrey College of Technology
South Essex College
TEESSIDE HEBP (Developmental engagement to cover Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, Stockton Riverside)
Telford College of Arts & Technology
Warrington Collegiate Institute

Summative reviews (2010-11)

Amersham and Wycombe College
Barking College
Barnet College
Barnfield College
Bexley College
Bicton College
Birmingham Metropolitan College
Bishop Auckland College
Blackburn College
Bournville College of FE
Bracknell and Wokingham College
Burnley College
Cirencester College
City College Birmingham
City College Plymouth
City of Bath College
City of Sunderland College
Derby College
East Berkshire College
East Durham College
Easton College
Epping Forest College
Estover Community College
Exeter College
Fareham College
Gateshead College
Grantham College
Greenwich Community College
Halesowen College
Harrow College
Hugh Baird College
Itchen College
Joseph Priestley College
Kendal College
Kensington and Chelsea College
Knowsley Community College
Leeds City College
Leeds College of Art
Leicester College
Lincoln College
Macclesfield College
Mid-Cheshire College of Further Education
Milton Keynes College
Moulton College
New College Stamford
New College Swindon

New College Telford
Newbury College
Newham College of Further Education
North Nottinghamshire College
North Warwickshire and Hinckley College
Northern College
Norton Radstock College
Oxford & Cherwell Valley College
Plymouth College of Art
Richmond Adult and Community College
Runshaw College
Ruskin College, Oxford
South Cheshire College
Southport College
SURF Leek College
SURF Newcastle under Lyme College
SURF South Staffordshire College (made up of Rodbaston, Cannock Chase, Tamworth & Lichfield)
SURF Stafford College
SURF Stoke on Trent College
SURF Walford & North Shropshire College
The Solihull College
Tresham College
Truro College
Warwickshire College
West Cheshire College
West Nottinghamshire College
West Thames College
Weymouth College
Wiltshire College

Appendix 3: Comparison data 2009-10 and 2010-11

Institutional audit

Judgements

Institutional audit (2010-11)

Judgement	Confidence	Limited confidence	Limited confidence restricted to certain provision
The soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards	25	1	1
The soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students	26	0	1

N=27

Institutional audit (2009-10)

Judgement	Confidence	Limited confidence	Limited confidence restricted to certain provision
The soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards	28	0	2
The soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students	30	0	0

N=30

Recommendations

Recommendations per year

Judgement	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Desirable	121 (3.03)	88 (2.93)	91 (3.37)
Advisable	104 (2.6)	100 (3.33)	96 (3.55)
Essential	5 (0.13)	2 (0.07)	3 (0.11)
Total audits	40	30	27

Note: the figure in brackets denotes the average number by review

Integrated quality and enhancement review

Judgements

Summative review (2010-11)

	Judgement on academic standards	Judgement on quality of learning opportunities	Public information
Confidence	74	74	
Limited confidence	1	1	
No confidence			
Reliance			74
No reliance			1

N=75

Summative review (2009-10)

	Judgement on academic standards	Judgement on quality of learning opportunities	Public information
Confidence	66	66	
Limited confidence	0	0	
No confidence	0	0	
Reliance			65
No reliance			1

N=66

Recommendations

Developmental engagements

Judgement	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Desirable	279 (4.23)	352 (4.46)	280 (3.94)
Advisable	119 (1.80)	158 (2.00)	126 (1.77)
Essential	4 (0.06)	1 (0.01)	1 (0.14)
Total reviews	66	79	71

Note: the figure in brackets denotes the average number by review

Summative reviews

Judgement	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Desirable	79 (3.29)	244 (3.70)	259 (3.45)
Advisable	48 (2.00)	128 (1.94)	137 (1.82)
Essential	2 (0.08)	5 (0.08)	1 (0.01)
Total reviews	24	66	75

Note: the figure in brackets denotes the average number by review

Appendix 4: Features of good practice and recommendations, by method

Excludes features and recommendations made only in respect of Foundation Degrees through Summative reviews.

Features of good practice

Area of good practice	Institutional audit	IQER: DEs	IQER: SRs
Academic Infrastructure	0%	2%	4%
Assessment	3%	31%	5%
Employer engagement	1%	7%	7%
Institution's quality management	45%	17%	25%
Public information	3%	11%	13%
Staff development	10%	9%	16%
Student experience	38%	22%	29%
Total	94	404	382

Recommendations

Area of recommendations	Institutional audit	IQER: DEs	IQER: SRs
Academic Infrastructure	7%	4%	7%
Assessment	6%	31%	6%
Employer engagement	1%	5%	3%
Institution's quality management	62%	23%	35%
Public information	9%	18%	22%
Staff development	2%	5%	10%
Student experience	15%	15%	17%
Total	190	407	397