Quality Assurance Agency: Institutional audit

Institutional Audit 2008

1 Institutional Audit is the review process used by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland. Audits are carried out by a team of academics who review an institution’s quality and standards, using their knowledge of higher education and reference points in the Academic Infrastructure.

2 The University underwent its last Institutional Audit in April 2008. The final version of the Report on the Institutional Audit, along with a more detailed Annex, has been published by the QAA on its website at: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reports/institutional/Reading08/summary.asp

3 The Audit followed the methodology for Institutional Audits introduced by the QAA for the period 2006-11, as detailed in the Handbook for institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland on the QAA website at: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/handbook2006/default.asp

4 A team of auditors from the QAA visited the University from 21 to 25 April 2008. They spoke to members of staff from across the University and current students and examined a wide range of documents relating to the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision.

5 The overall outcome of the audit was very positive for the University. The audit team concluded as a result of its investigations that ‘confidence’ (the highest possible rating) could reasonably be placed in:

- the soundness of the University’s present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers;

- the soundness of the University’s present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

The audit team commented positively on the University’s “institution-wide approach to enhancing quality of provision” and the strengthening of institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students, “which will improve monitoring, consistency and the general management of the postgraduate student experience”. It also concluded that “the University’s arrangements for collaborative provision are sound and reliable and generally reflect the precepts of the Code of Practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning).”
The audit team considered that “reliance can be reasonably placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards”.

6 The audit report identified the following areas of good practice:

- The way in which the University’s Strategy for Learning and Teaching and its associated Implementation Plan provide a clear direction for enhancement and development activities, and a comprehensive framework for delivery;
- The University’s achievement in continually reviewing, refreshing and enhancing its provision of student support and student services;
- The ways in which the Quality Support Office, the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning and the Centre for Staff Training and Development are working together to support the development and delivery of the University’s Strategy for Learning and Teaching and related activities;
- The development of user-friendly and informative publications such as Teaching Matters and Policy Plus to raise staff awareness of developments in teaching and learning, and in quality assurance and enhancement.

7 The report made the following recommendations:

- The team advised the University to be more thorough in ensuring that annual monitoring reports are received, cover the intended areas, and are given full scrutiny at the appropriate level, ensuring in particular that UBTL has sufficient time to consider in detail the reports from faculties;

- It would be desirable that the University make explicit the formal responsibilities of different post holders for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of published information.

Response to the Institutional Audit and future developments

8 UBTL received the Report of the Institutional Audit at its meeting on 15 October 2008 and agreed that a working group would be convened to consider the report in detail and to draft an action plan to address the recommendations and other matters raised therein. The working group will report back to UBTL at the end of the Summer Term 2009.

9 In addition to the main Institutional Audit process, as part of its overall Review strategy, the QAA has introduced a new process of Mid-Cycle Reviews, timed for the mid-point between an institution’s last and next Institutional Audits and described as an ‘institutional health-check’. This will be a wholly paper-based exercise, and will be co-ordinated and handled by the Quality Support Office.
In December 2008, the QAA launched a consultation on proposed changes to two aspects of the Institutional Audit method: the approach to the audit of collaborative provision and the inclusion of student members of audit teams. The closing date for responses to the consultation is 1 March 2009. Further details can be found at: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/.

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