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Subject	Notice of publication of <i>Outcomes from institutional audit: Student engagement</i>
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Recipients	Heads of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland; Universities UK; GuildHE; Higher Education Funding Council for England; Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland; Higher Education Academy; Association of Colleges; National Union of Students; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
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Dear colleague

I am writing to introduce the next paper in QAA's *Outcomes from Institutional Audit* series. The paper looks at the topic of student engagement. It draws on findings from 59 Institutional Audit reports published between September 2009 and July 2011.

The paper presents findings from Institutional Audit on the involvement of students in programme approval, monitoring and review; student representation structures; and the ways in which institutions collect and act upon students' views. A summary of the paper is attached. The full paper will be available at www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/outcomes-student-engagement.aspx.

Three more papers in the series are planned for publication later this year:

- Assessment and feedback
- Postgraduate research students
- Collaborative provision.

QAA aims to promote and enhance the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. *Outcomes from Institutional Audit* papers provide important information and messages to the sector as a whole. We hope they help those who are responsible for quality and standards at all levels in higher education institutions to review and compare their own practice with that of others, and learn from the experience.

We hope you will find this notice of publication and summary of the paper useful. Any feedback should be addressed to [**outcomes@qaa.ac.uk**](mailto:outcomes@qaa.ac.uk).

Yours sincerely



Anthony McClaran
Chief Executive

Summary

This paper is based on the analysis of 59 Institutional Audit reports published between September 2009 and July 2011. The reports represent a wide sample of institutional types. The institutions were universal in involving their students in quality assurance and enhancement activity. In a few cases, this involvement was very limited, but the institutions concerned were idiosyncratic in their constitution or student body.

Most institutions are involving students in concerted and effective ways at senior levels, normally through the Students' Union or equivalent body, with whom they work hard at establishing a productive partnership. Formal deliberative committee arrangements are complimented by less formal means for Students' Union officers to interact with senior institutional personnel. The 20 features of good practice relating to student engagement were tempered by 26 related recommendations.

At operational levels, a rather more mixed picture of engagement emerges. At the disciplinary or subject level, students are often fully engaged through a variety of mechanisms. These usually relate to module or unit evaluations which contribute to annual monitoring. Students also have opportunities to feed back on wider institutional matters through staff-student liaison committees, or similar bodies. At the layer above that of the department, there is less widespread active engagement. At both levels, weakness is usually due to inconsistent application of policy, although there may be other factors applicable to poor faculty engagement.

Another range of operational involvement concerns student contributions to the processes of approval and periodic review of programmes. Particularly in the latter case, this may be from two perspectives. Students may either meet review panels, or sit on them; the former is more common. A wide range of surveys were reported to be in use, either looking at specific aspects of provision, such as libraries, or more general 'student satisfaction surveys'. The use of external surveys was a noticeable ingredient of the feedback mix, with the National Student Survey (NSS) particularly well embedded across relevant institutions. There were a few indicators of concern that students may be subject to too many surveys, thus developing 'survey fatigue'. Institutions were also attempting to be more creative in seeking feedback, for example, by using focus groups or employing online techniques. In as much as responding to student's feedback and communicating those responses depended upon the representational structures, the same weaknesses of inconsistency applied.

The cumulative evidence of the reports show that a culture of engagement with students is being further embedded. However, in setting up or sustaining appropriate systems, these must be made known to students and there must be appropriate training and development if this culture is to be sustained.

Sharing external examiner reports with students through their representatives is proving a problematic area in many cases, shown by the 22 recommendations that were made. Often these recommendations were prompted by weaknesses in the student representative systems upon which policy for sharing relied.



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