

**Executive Summary of Business
for Senate**



Title	QAA Institutional Audit: Progress against 2008 action plan and 2011 mid-cycle review
Author	Sam Riordan, Head of Academic Registry
Type	
Date	7th March 2011
Strategic context	T&L Strategy, Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy
Summary	<p>To receive a progress report on the action plan approved following the 2008 Institutional Audit and confirm timescale and process for managing outstanding actions.</p> <p>To receive information on the mid-cycle review (deadline for submission: 30th June 2011)</p>
Essential reading	<p>The QAA Institutional Audit report can be found on Sussex Direct and at:</p> <p>http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reports/institutional/Sussex08/RG392Sussex.pdf</p> <p>A full analysis of the report can be found in TLC/6/9.</p>
Risk analysis	Medium
Resource implications	
Consultation	This report has been considered by Teaching and Learning Committee
Effective date	Immediate
Recommendation	Senate is invited to note the progress report against the 2008 Institutional Audit Action Plan, and the establishment of a working group to prepare for the mid-cycle review.

QAA Institutional Audit: Progress against 2008 action plan and 2011 mid-cycle review

1. Introduction

The QAA's Report on the May 2008 Institutional Audit was published in Autumn 2008. The report identified a number of features of good practice and included many positive comments. The report can be found at:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reports/institutional/Sussex08/RG392Sussex.pdf>

And a full analysis of the report can be found in **TLC/6/9**.

2. Progress against 2008 Action Plan

The QAA categorises its recommendations as "essential", "advisable" and "desirable" in order of their priority. The University had no essential recommendations and only two recommendations as follows:

Recommendation for action that the audit team considers **advisable**:

- to review the approach at institutional level to the use of the qualitative and quantitative management information collected from both internal and external sources with a view to establishing a holistic and methodical approach to the provision of student learning opportunities (paragraphs 55, 63, 64, 76, 123 of the Annex).

Recommendation for action that the audit team considers **desirable**:

- to take stock of departmental practices in the support and preparation of postgraduate research students for assessment to encourage consistency of approach across the institution (paragraph 163 of the Annex).

A number of other comments and suggestions about where improvements might be made were, however, included in the text of the Report and Annex. These were included in the Action Plan approved by Teaching and Learning Committee and Senate in November (TLC/6/9/3) and December (S-219-7) 2008.

In approving the action plan in December 2008, Senate noted that the proposed timescales were ambitious, given the wider institutional context and imminence of Schools restructuring in particular. This proved an accurate concern, as during 2009 and 2010 priority had to be given to:

- Introduction of new Schools including recruitment of new Heads of Schools, revision to QA structures and operational processes - for October 2009.
- A further period of significant internal restructuring in 2009/10 (Proposals for Change);
- A major tranche of development of new programmes and their validation/launch

An updated Action Plan, with revised timescales for completion, is attached as Appendix A.

3. Mid-Cycle Review

QAA Mid-Cycle Review (a 'short health check') requires submission of briefing paper to QAA by June 2011. The briefing paper should be of no more than 4-6 sides A4, together with key papers that explain action taken in response to advisable and desirable audit recommendations plus copies of a sample of internal review reports or equivalent.

A drafting group chaired by the PVC Teaching and Learning, and including student representation, will be established to work on the briefing paper. A final draft of the briefing paper will be presented to the June meeting of Teaching and Learning Committee.

Sam Riordan
Head of Academic Registry

QAA Institutional Audit Report 2008: Action Plan (revised and updated, February 2011)

Recommendation for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- to review the approach at institutional level to the use of the qualitative and quantitative management information collected from both internal and external sources with a view to establishing a holistic and methodical approach to the provision of student learning opportunities (paragraphs 55, 63, 64, 76, 123 of the Annex).

Recommendation for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- to take stock of departmental practices in the support and preparation of postgraduate research students for assessment to encourage consistency of approach across the institution (paragraph 163 of the Annex)

Extracts from the Institutional Audit Report and Annex	Action (including those responsible)	Progress as of February 2011 and timescale for completion
<p>Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities</p> <p><i>Annex para 27</i> The University will wish to ensure that it maintains rigorous procedures for discharging institutional-level responsibility for the management and surveillance of academic quality and standards throughout the University's current restructuring and into the future.'</p>	<p>PVC T&L and TLC to ensure that an appropriate QA and E framework is developed and approved to underpin the new School structure.</p>	<p>A revised T&L infrastructure was introduced 2009/10 (first discussed at TLC 6 – Nov 08 and throughout 2008/9 Academic Year, prior to approval by Senate). The intention was to review end 2010 academic year but subsequently impacted by interlude between PVC Wright and PVC Mackie, so review only partial –significant revisions made for Jan 2011 implementation.</p> <p>Remains under further review for October 2011 implementation - TLC agenda, Sept 2011</p>
<p>Programme Approval</p> <p><i>Report paragraph 27</i> '..... Consideration of resource issues is a required element of the prescribed procedures but is not always systematically recorded.'</p> <p><i>Annex paragraph 55</i> '....The documentation did not demonstrate whether overall resource requirements were considered in the approval in a systematic way to support the learning opportunities to be provided to students.'</p>	<p>Academic Office to ensure appropriate recording of resource issues by both Strategy and Resources Committee Sub-Group and Validation Events</p>	<p>Completed:</p> <p>SRC Sub-Group (now SPC Sub-Group) falls within remit of Planning Division and is explicitly concerned with resource issues including viable business plans and impact on learning resources/student experience.</p> <p>Consideration of (learning) resources and the student experience fully addressed via validation process.</p>

<p>Annual Monitoring</p> <p><i>Annex paragraph 30</i> ‘.....Review of the data provided for a sample of programmes demonstrated to the audit team that detailed and sophisticated management data were made available to departments to support the annual monitoring process. The template-based annual monitoring reports had a tendency to be descriptive rather than evaluative in content, with much of the detail being lost as the reports passed to higher levels in the committee structure.’</p> <p><i>Annex paragraph 44</i> ‘The University uses an extensive set of centrally produced statistics relating to student performance, retention and progression. It was clear to the audit team that subsets of these data were a key information source in the annual monitoring process and provided a detailed and rich source of information about recruitment, withdrawals, transfers, progression and exit awards. The data also enable a snapshot to be formed of cohort performance. While the statistical information provided is comprehensive and detailed, as noted above (see paragraph 30) the requirements of the annual monitoring process do not invite a detailed analysis of the information available to the department.’</p> <p><i>Report paragraph 30</i> ‘..... but the minutes of relevant school and institution-level committees did not demonstrate structured analysis and synthesis of information from annual monitoring and review that might contribute effectively to the institution's management of the academic quality of its provision.’</p> <p><i>Annex paragraph 62</i> ‘....The annual monitoring reports accompanying the review documentation showed a reasonable approach to the creation of a school-wide summary from the heads of departments' reports. Although generally adequate, the format, coverage and quality of the latter were variable in quality and usefulness. Information from student feedback was not a major feature of the documented proceedings, although there was reference to the outcomes of the</p>	<p>Head of Academic Registry to work with the Director of Planning to devise an annual monitoring process which will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dovetail with the annual planning process to avoid duplication and ensure that management information produced via annual monitoring informs academic planning. • Revise guidance to Schools and departments in order to secure more analysis and better engagement to support the new School structures. • Ensure systematic identification of university –wide issues to be addressed and their consideration by the appropriate university-level committees or officers <p>Also to feed into review of how qualitative and quantitative data is used at institutional level to systematically enhance student learning opportunities (action proposed in response to recommendation 1)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The revised planning process has brought in information from a wider set of sources. ▪ Annual Monitoring process has not yet been systematically reviewed in this context, partly a consequence of timing of revisions to planning process referred to above and need to be informed by these. <p>Review for 2011/12 implementation – TLC agenda, June/September 2011</p>
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<p>National Student Survey.’ <i>Annex paragraph 57</i> ‘The information accumulated through the annual monitoring process is reasonably detailed but the level of detail diminishes as outcomes are summarised at school level for report to the University. The major part of the evaluation of the outcomes of the monitoring process occurs at school level. The process is generally, but not always, completed in time for any proposed changes to be implemented by schools in the subsequent year. Departmental minutes showed that matters relating to annual monitoring were addressed at the relevant departmental and school level committees; the records of discussion are brief and limited to reporting on the progression of the process.’ <i>Report paragraph 28/Annex para 58</i> ‘..... The Briefing Paper noted variable engagement by schools and departments with the data available in support of annual monitoring. Documentation seen by the audit team confirmed this variability which, in the team's view, limited the potential for the data to contribute in a structured and systematic way to local and institutional discussion of matters arising from annual monitoring. The minutes of the University Teaching and Learning Committee and its predecessor bodies suggest that discussion of annual monitoring at that level makes a limited contribution to quality assurance.’ <i>Annex paragraph 56</i> ‘In the academic year 2004-05, the University conducted a review of annual monitoring, which streamlined some elements of the process. The Briefing Paper pointed to the scope for the process to be dovetailed with the annual planning process, to avoid duplication and to encourage academic staff to use annual monitoring to inform academic planning, a view that the audit team would endorse.’</p>		
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<p>Periodic Review</p> <p><i>Annex paragraph 63</i> The institutional Briefing Paper indicated that the link between the operation of the process and the progression of institutional aims and priorities remained weak. In this regard, although the Briefing Paper also indicated that 'the reviews provide[d] the opportunity for the institution to identify common trends', it was not clear from the documentation available to the team how any such trends or institutional issues that arose were dealt with systematically. Consideration of the minutes of relevant school and institution-level committees revealed a lack of structured analysis and synthesis of information derived from the periodic review process in the identification of institutional-level academic priorities, including those that might contribute to more explicitly managed continuous improvement in the learning opportunities available to students.'</p> <p><i>Annex paragraph 64</i> 'In common with annual monitoring, the periodic review process does not include a strong element of evaluation based upon the synthesis of students' views, which are available from a number of sources. This characteristic of the processes, although ensuring a focus on the academic provision, does not bring the students' experience of that provision to the fore. From its review of examples of the operation of the routine monitoring and review processes, the audit team came to the view that the University was not exploiting the opportunity to gain a full insight into the student experience in its schools, and to disseminate the information it collected from the processes to, contributes to the systematic enhancement of that experience.'</p>	<p>Academic Office to review the mechanism for systematic identification of trends and institutional issues arising from periodic review at both School and University levels (eg consider re-instatement of annual overview report) and their consideration by relevant officers and University –level committees.</p> <p>Academic Office to review the guidance for preparation of the SED, guidance to periodic review teams and template for reports.</p> <p>Also to feed into review of how qualitative and quantitative data is used at institutional level to systematically enhance student learning opportunities (action proposed in response to recommendation 1)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Periodic Review process suspended during Schools restructuring period (2008/09 and 2009/10) but trends and institutional issues identified via other mechanisms (eg NSS). <p>NB TLC (reporting to Senate) approved suspension of Periodic Review in Nov/Dec 2008 (simultaneously with approval of Action Plan) – risk assessment deemed this course of action low-risk.</p> <p>During 2010/11 and 2011/12 there is a University-wide Portfolio Review process which will fulfil the role of the Periodic Review process, following which TLC will reinstate a fit-for-purpose Periodic Review process.</p>
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<p><i>Links between Teaching and Research</i></p> <p><i>Annex paragraph 65</i> The Teaching and Learning Strategy aspires to ensure that future teaching is more comprehensively able to demonstrate that it is informed by cutting-edge research and that it takes place in a research-enriched environment; the implementation plan for the Strategy does not identify the specific actions that will ensure that the aspiration will be fulfilled.'</p>	<p>PVC Education and TLC to address in next version /update of the Teaching and Learning Strategy</p>	<p>T&L Strategy reviewed 2008/09 and associated operational plan revised Autumn 2009, prior to submission to Senate December 2009. Further review anticipated for 2011/12 under leadership of PVC Mackie.</p> <p>Portfolio Review process will explicitly address research-led teaching in redesign of curriculum for 2012.</p>
<p>External Examiners Reports</p> <p><i>Annex paragraph 33</i> 'The University indicated that external examiners' reports were made available to students through their representation on the school learning and teaching committees; students who met the team had little knowledge of this provision, which was introduced in the academic year 2007-08.'</p>	<p>Academic Office to highlight the availability of external examiners reports via the Student Representative Scheme and Academic Registrar to draw to the attention of ELG</p>	<p>To be progressed via Student Experience Forum late 2010/11.</p>
<p>Assessment policies and regulations</p> <p><i>Annex paragraph 41</i> 'Despite the clarity of the common-credit framework for undergraduate programmes, there seemed little awareness on the part of the students who met the audit team about what was required for them to succeed, nor the criteria attached to individual assessments.'</p>	<p>SRPC and ELG to discuss means of making students more aware of the requirements</p>	<p>To be progressed via Student Experience Forum late 2010/11.</p>
<p>Engagement with PSRBs</p> <p><i>Annex paragraph 39</i> The requirements of accrediting bodies are an additional benchmark for academic standards and form an integral part of the approval and review processes. There was no evidence of central oversight of the information that was being given by departments to students about the role of</p>	<p>Academic Office to draw up a set of protocols for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional sign off for accreditation/recognition submissions to PSRBs 	<p>In progress following restructuring. Scheduled for completion for full implementation 2011/12.</p> <p>TLC agenda June/September 2011.</p>

<p>these bodies, and the requirements that graduates would have to meet. Interactions with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies are largely devolved to departments.'</p> <p><i>Annex paragraph 52</i></p> <p>The University has a range of provision for which it seeks professional, statutory or regulatory bodies' recognition. Preparation for external reviews at the subject level is largely undertaken at school level and accreditation documentation is not seen or approved by the University prior to its submission to an accrediting body. The consideration of reports from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies is a duty of the University Teaching and Learning Committee as part of its oversight and development of the quality assurance of the University's provision. Minutes and papers of school committees demonstrate local action in response to professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' reports. The level of detail in the information considered at University level was sufficient for the University Teaching and Learning Committee to confirm that schools had considered the reports and identified the necessary actions. Documentation for accredited programmes viewed by the audit team indicated that there was not always a systematic method through which institutional-level recommendations or requirements contained in the reports were considered and responses produced: this was in contrast with the verifiable route for consideration of the reports arising from General Medical Council through the Joint Approval and Review Board (paragraphs 144 to 146).'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversight of information given to students about the roles of the relevant PSRB and its requirements • A systematic method for ensuring that institutional-level recommendations are considered by the appropriate body 	
<p>Student Representation</p> <p><i>Annex paragraph 74</i></p> <p>In the Briefing Paper the University identified the need for further progress in ensuring that postgraduate research students were represented effectively, particularly at institutional level. This view was confirmed by the audit</p>	<p>PVC Allison and Head of the Doctoral School to draw up proposals for increased representation of pgr students at institutional level.</p>	<p>Completed: Review of student representation for 2009/10 included PGR representation increased at Doctoral School Committee and Senate. PGT representation added to TLC.</p>

team in discussion with staff who indicated that the voice of the postgraduate research student was a deficient area and that the planned Doctoral School would represent an opportunity to address this. Within schools, postgraduate research students have the opportunity through annual progress reviews to express their views, should more informal mechanisms prove ineffective.'		
Feedback on outcomes of Student Evaluations <i>Report paragraph 34/Annex paragraph 70</i> The students confirmed that they were aware of the outcomes of surveys and action in response at the local level; awareness of action at institutional level towards continuous improvement in the learning opportunities available to students was more limited.	ELG and TLC to discuss a more effective means of disseminating to students institutional action in response to surveys. (Academic Registrar and Head of Student Experience to take action)	This has been addressed by a combination of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creation of NSS web pages for students ▪ Revamping the student representative scheme ▪ Revamping the Student Experience Forum (SEF) ▪ Direct communication with students/student representatives from PVC Teaching and Learning (for example, message sent at start of academic year to new and returning students)
Management Information: Student Evaluations <i>Report paragraph 35/Annex paragraph 76</i> Through discussion with staff and students, the audit team came to the view that there was some disparity between the structured systems in place for student representation and the degree to which the broader student body felt that the University listened and responded to their views. There was a perception on the part of the students that at University level specific student led campaigns were the most effective way of securing action on particular issues. There was evidence that while the systems worked effectively at departmental level, they did not allow the University to obtain an overview of student views to assist in determining priorities for resource allocation towards continuous improvement of the learning opportunities provided for its students.	As the results of the first Sussex Student Experience Survey were not available at the time of the Audit, it was not yet apparent how the outcomes of the Survey might contribute both to local and institutional Teaching and Learning Strategies. Head of Academic Registry and Head of Student Support and Experience to monitor and review the ways in which the outcomes of the SES will integrate with annual monitoring, consideration of the NSS outcomes and updating of the Teaching and Learning Strategy.	SES (Student Experience Survey) no longer used - response rate was extremely poor and general view was that students were experiencing 'questionnaire fatigue', and that there were more effective ways of securing student feedback – the redevelopment of the Course Evaluation Questionnaire (CEQ) largely addresses this. General principle (of comprehensively integrating data from various sources) remains valid.

<p>Learning resources</p> <p><i>Annex paragraph 83</i> 'Students at all levels and stages of study reported that the library resources were inadequate for their needs; issues identified were lack of availability of course resources, out-of-date resources, limited access to electronic resources, the currency of journals and dissatisfaction with interlibrary loans and the cost of course 'readers'.'</p> <p><i>Report paragraph 39/Annex paragraph 86</i> The results of internal and external surveys indicate that there is scope for improvement in the effectiveness of the arrangements, with particular reference to the match between the provision of resources and student learning needs. There was evidence of the University taking action in response to the findings of such surveys; the University will wish to monitor the efficacy of that action in improving the learning resources available to students.</p>	<p>TLC to monitor SES and NSS outcomes and determine appropriate strategy with the Librarian.</p>	<p>SES no longer used. NSS outcomes and library/learning resource strategy within direct remit of PVC Teaching and Learning (reporting to TLC), with Librarian now reporting directly to PVC Teaching and Learning (rather than DVC, as previously).</p>
<p>Student Support</p> <p><i>Annex paragraph 105</i> 'There remains some work to be done in the area of personal development planning, given the national expectations on Higher Education Progress files.'</p>	<p>TLC to monitor the development of Sussex Plus</p>	<p>Regular reporting to VCEG and PVC Teaching and Learning.</p>
<p>Staff Support and Development</p> <p><i>Report paragraph 49/Annex paragraph 112</i> The University's policy is that all new academic staff should be allocated a member of senior staff as a mentor but the University acknowledges that practice 'continues to be variable' and that it needs to develop guidelines to ensure that all new staff benefit from mentoring.</p>	<p>Director of HR to develop guidelines and review policy on mentoring</p>	<p>Being taken forwards Spring 2011 (with Heads of Schools).</p>

<p>Management Information on the Quality of Learning Opportunities</p> <p><i>Report paragraph 54/Annex paragraph 123</i> The audit team found that the University gathered feedback from a range of internal and external sources, including the outcomes of surveys, monitoring and review activity and reports from external bodies, about the learning opportunities available to its students but that there was scope for greater synthesis and analysis of the intelligence derived from all these sources. The team came to the view that the University's management of student learning resources was secure but that there was potential for the institution to make more effective use of the range of information available to it on the continuing suitability of its provision of learning support and facilities. Accordingly, the team considers it advisable that the University review its approach at institutional level to the use of the qualitative and quantitative management information collected from both internal and external sources, with a view to establishing a holistic and methodical approach to the provision of student learning opportunities. As the University considers this recommendation it may wish to give particular attention to the contribution of the annual quality monitoring and periodic review processes to the appraisal and systematic improvement of student learning opportunities.'</p> <p><i>Report paragraph 59/Annex paragraph 132</i> 'The team found limited evaluation of the impact or effectiveness of the University's overall approach to enhancement for students and their learning but, in the view of the team, the development and implementation of the student evaluation and continuous improvement strategy have the potential to make a significant contribution in this area.'</p>	<p>Academic Registrar, Head of Academic Registry and Head of Student Support and Experience to review how qualitative and quantitative information is used at institutional level to inform an holistic and methodological approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities</p>	<p>Progress made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Revised system for recording student feedback on courses. The web-based system has closed the loop and feeds back actions to students. ▪ Changes to the Student Experience Forum to make this more effective. ▪ Established the Student Life Centre to better engage with students ▪ Groups for specific engagement with students on how student learning resources (e.g. Library, IT) are managed. ▪ Enhancements to teaching and learning-related information available to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A revised planning system for Schools - Portfolio review <p>Further work required includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Periodic Review and Annual Monitoring (see below)
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<p>Institutional Approach to Quality Enhancement</p> <p><i>Annex paragraph 125</i> The portfolio of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Education embraces the academic leadership of quality enhancement and the overall student experience for taught programmes; responsibility for enhancement of the postgraduate research student experience at this level is not specified in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy.'</p>	<p>Academic Office to update the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy</p>	<p>Referred to Teaching and Learning Committee/PVC Mackie</p> <p>TLC agenda June/September 2011</p>
<p>Postgraduate Research Students</p> <p><i>Report paragraph 71/Annex paragraph 163</i> '..... The University specifically requires that students be offered training in preparation for their examination, but students meeting the audit team indicated that the nature of this training depended on schools and that there was some variability in practice. The team considers it desirable, therefore, that the University take stock of departmental practices in the support and preparation of postgraduate research students for assessment, to encourage consistency of approach across the institution.'</p>	<p>The Doctoral School Committee to institute a review of departmental practices on preparing research students for the doctoral examination with a view to implementing consistent practice with effect for 2009/10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A consultant was engaged to identify the skills need by PGR students and the current skills gap. ▪ Design and delivery of a training programme for PGR students will be implemented by the new Assistant Director of the Doctoral School once that person takes up their appointment. ▪ The programme will be facilitated by the University's recent success in obtaining funds for a Doctoral Training Centre <p>Proposals for implementation October 2011 via Doctoral School Committee</p>