

Institutional Audit 2011 - Frequently Asked Questions

What is Institutional Audit all about?

The focus of Institutional Audit (IA) is on how UW manages the security of academic standards of its awards and of the quality of the learning opportunities it provides to enable students to achieve those standards. In order to test this, the Audit looks at:

- institutional management of academic standards
- institutional management of learning opportunities
- institutional approach to quality enhancement
- collaborative arrangements
- institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students
- published information.

What is the benefit of Institutional Audit?

Institutional Audit is really about safeguarding the public interest in the standards and quality of higher education and encouraging continuous improvement. It is an evidence based process carried out through peer review. The Audit Team will make judgements about the soundness of our arrangements for the management of standards and quality – it therefore provides an endorsement of what we do in the context of national expectations.

In addition, the Audit Team will identify features of good practice and will also make recommendations for development.

If the Audit Team is unable to reach judgements of 'confidence' in what we do, then the outcome will be 'limited confidence' which is not a judgement of failure, but indicates that improvements need to be made in managing academic standards.

The preparation for and process of IA benefits the University in a number of ways: it provides a spur to review and evaluate our processes and procedures more 'holistically', and to 'take stock'; it also prompts us to work closely with the Students' Union in evaluating the student experience. Of course these are things we do on an ongoing basis anyway, but IA has the added benefit of independent peers evaluating the effectiveness of what we do.

What will Institutional Audit mean for me?

For the majority of staff IA means business as usual, although we hope that all staff are aware of and working with us to implement the changes to policy and process that we have put in place over the last period – particularly the developments relating to the student representation system, course management committees, module evaluation, peer learning through observation etc, and crucially ensuring documentation for students is accurate.

For those staff selected to meet with the Audit Team, don't worry, we will brief you!

How will this Audit differ from the previous audit?

Key changes that have occurred since the last round of IA include:

- there are no Discipline Audit Trails – no meetings with groups of students and staff from particular subject areas
- the Audit Team will undertake two sampling trails drawn from recent periodic reviews and their follow up
- the Audit will have a stronger focus on quality enhancement
- there is a strengthened emphasis on student participation and there will be a student auditor on the Audit Team
- there will be fewer meetings with staff
- changes have been made to the final judgements, with the judgement 'broad confidence' becoming 'confidence'. There is also a separation of the judgement on quality and standards and potentially the judgement can distinguish between UW based and collaborative provision.

We still need to provide a document – now called the Briefing Paper – setting out how we manage quality at the University and how we know it works.

Who are the auditors that will be carrying out the UW Audit?

- Peter Bush - PVC (Academic), University of Northampton
- Karen Powell Williams - PL (Leadership and Development), University of Westminster
- Peter Leyland – Academic Framework Manager, Manchester Metropolitan University
- Jon Rowson - School of Electronic Engineering and Computer Science, Queen Mary, University of London
- Steve Topazio - (Student Auditor), President SU, University of Portsmouth
- Alison Blackburn - (Audit Secretary) Head of Academic Standards and Quality Unit, University of Central Lancashire

When will the Audit happen?

The Audit will take place on the following dates:

- Briefing Visit: 8th to 10th February 2011
- Audit Visit: 14th to 18th March 2011.

We have decided to locate the Audit Team at the City Campus in the Board Room and the Chapel.

How are we preparing for Audit?

UW is preparing for audit through the Institutional Audit Working Group (IAWG). This group has representation from all Institutes and key student support services. The IAWG has been important in evaluating strengths, identifying good practice and areas where we are less confident of processes. This work has informed the drafting of the Briefing Paper. There is also a smaller Action Plan Group doing more detailed work in preparing the Briefing Paper (see below). Regular updates on progress are provided to Heads of Institute and VCAG.

What is the role of students in the Audit?

Just as the University prepares and submits a Briefing Paper, the Students' Union prepares a Students' Written Submission. This addresses four key questions:

- How accurate is the information that the University publishes?
- Do students know what is expected of them?
- What is the student experience as a learner like?
- Do students have a voice in the University and is it listened to?

Students' Union officers will meet with the Auditors on the Briefing Visit, and the Audit Team will also meet with a group of students during the visit. The group of students will be composed of undergraduate and postgraduate students, including research students. The Auditors are likely to ask us to include an international student, a disabled student and some StARs. Students will be asked about their experience at the University and also about things such as whether they have seen external examiner reports, completed module evaluations, how they know what happens to views fed into course committees etc.

What documentation do we need?

The University will provide the Audit Team with key documents, such as strategy and policy papers in advance of the Audit. The Audit Team will also have access to the University web-pages, including the AQU, Registry and Student Services, Personnel and ADPU pages. A range of additional documentation may be requested by the Audit Team. We will only know what documentation is needed during the Briefing Visit that occurs five weeks before the Audit Visit. However, we are not asking Institutes to provide any documentation other than that normally collated in the course of quality monitoring, ie annual evaluation reports, Institute and course committee minutes, etc. Documentation that may be requested includes:

- Institute Board and committee agendas and minutes
- AER documentation for courses and Institutes, including link tutor reports
- external examiners' reports and course team response to those reports (normally part of the AER)
- PSRB and internal periodic review reports and follow up action plans
- programme specifications and course handbooks
- evidence of Institute assessment policies/procedures
- evidence of how students are involved in quality management and quality enhancement activities – mainly module evaluation and student representation
- evidence of research activity that informs learning opportunities
- evidence of student support in general – personal tutor systems - and for other modes of study (such as workbased and flexible and distributed learning)
- evidence of how the Academic Infrastructure and other reference points are used to guide programme development, delivery and enhancement
- evidence of how management information, including statistical data, student feedback and NSS results, is used
- evidence of how good practice is disseminated
- evidence of the effectiveness of learning resources
- evidence of admissions policies
- evidence of staff appraisal and support, and staff development and reward, including peer learning through observation.

What should we do with the documentation?

Make sure that documentation is easily accessible - collated centrally in the Institute where appropriate – electronically if possible. If we need documentation from you we will contact you at fairly short notice so it is important that colleagues know where documentation is. We do not intend to set up what used to be termed a ‘base room’ with masses of paper documentation, but be aware that the Audit is based on evidence.

Who will meet the Audit Team?

The Audit Team will agree what meetings they want to hold at the Briefing Visit that will take place five weeks before the Audit Visit. They will also identify who the participants in each meeting should be; so, for example, they may identify that they want to meet a course leader, a link tutor, a new member of staff, a Teaching Fellow, and someone recently promoted. They may specify from which Institutes these staff should be drawn. It is likely that they will only hold 4 or 5 meetings in total, each with small groups of staff (approximately 8 people); most meetings will last 90 or 120 minutes. They will also meet students. We will, of course, ensure that any staff or students meeting with the Audit Team are properly briefed – and if necessary we will arrange transport to City Campus!

When will we know the outcome of the Institutional Audit?

A letter agreed by the Audit Team outlining the key findings, including areas of good practice and any recommendations (classified as essential, advisable or desirable), will be sent to the University by QAA within two weeks of the completion of the Audit Visit. QAA will publish a report setting out the Audit Team’s findings, structured into a number of parts:

- report intended for lay and external professional audiences
- technical annexe with more detail and explanation intended to be useful to the University.

We will receive the draft report approximately 8 weeks after the Audit Visit.

Can I read the Briefing Paper?

Yes, the draft version of the Institutional Audit Briefing Paper has now been posted on the O drive at <O:\All Staff Documents\AQU\Institutional Audit\2010.10.19 Draft Master Briefing Paper for Institutional Audit.docx>.

Comments are welcome.

Dr Marie Stowell
Director of Quality and Educational Development

October 2010