guide to the portfolio

2002/03
The Acute Hospital Portfolio is a collection of audits covering key topics that are relevant to acute hospitals and that are important to patients, NHS trust managers and staff. Topics have been added to the portfolio at the rate of four per year. The final four will be added during 2003 to complete the 16 topics originally envisaged.

Data are collected in national surveys for each topic at all relevant NHS acute hospital trusts in England and Wales. Auditors then provide each trust involved with a tailored performance assessment, based on the national comparative data collected, but which also takes account of the local circumstances of the trust. In-depth audit work may then be indicated, but will be undertaken only in a minority of trusts that demonstrably need it.

The results of the surveys are published in short national reviews and the data, on which the reviews are based, together with computer software to facilitate their use, are released to NHS bodies. Detailed definitions of the performance indicators, good practice examples and other management tools are also made available to trusts on the Acute Hospital Portfolio website: http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/itc/acuteportfolio.shtml

The portfolio includes a commitment from the Audit Commission to repeat the national surveys regularly so that progress can be monitored and topics updated at least every four years. This will commence in 2004, subject to changes to audit and inspection of the NHS announced by the Government.

The Portfolio at a glance

The Acute Hospital Portfolio offers some important benefits to trusts:

- regular performance assessments in key service areas with independent interpretation by auditors;
- robust national comparative data that are made available to trusts, most of which are new and not otherwise available;
- opportunities to tailor comparisons to any comparative group of participating trusts (using the software provided by the Audit Commission);
- detailed guidance on the indicators which have been used for the performance assessments;

Benefits to NHS trusts
management tools and good practice examples; and
continuity of the topics and data.

The Portfolio has been well received by trusts. Over 76 per cent of acute trusts’ chief executives responded to a satisfaction survey carried out last year and the majority of those agreed that the portfolio was an improvement on previous Audit Commission value-for-money work.

The remainder of this leaflet discusses each of the main components of the portfolio in more detail.

Topics in the Portfolio

A complete list of the 16 topics included in the portfolio is shown (EXHIBIT 1, overleaf). During 2002/03 auditors will be providing trusts with performance assessments covering four core clinical services:

- outpatients;
- waits for admission;
- bed management; and
- operating theatres.

Links between the topics in terms of patient experiences, efficiency and capacity will also be highlighted.

Later in the year, data collection will begin for the final four topics:

- information and records;
- pathology;
- facilities management; and
- therapists.

Performance assessments for the other eight topics have already been reported to trusts in previous phases of the portfolio audit work. National reviews of the portfolio results have been published and the data are being circulated to acute trusts, primary care trusts, strategic health authorities and to other parts of the NHS.
The national surveys for each topic have three main stages (EXHIBIT 2):

- data collection from NHS trusts;
- diagnostic performance assessment and feedback of results to trusts; and
- in-depth case studies and audit.

The topics, survey tools and analysis software are developed centrally by the Audit Commission’s Portfolio Project Team. Liaison with trusts is carried out via local auditors who agree, with each trust, the work to be carried out and the timetable for completing it. Auditors provide a vital link between the central team and individual trusts at all stages. They are extensively trained and supported by the central team to carry out the audit work.
Data collection

The data collection stage is the foundation on which all the other stages are based. Wherever possible, data are taken from routine national sources and standard definitions are applied, but many areas of the portfolio are not covered by existing data, so the Audit Commission provides electronic forms for trusts to complete. In some cases, specially written computer software is also provided to assist trusts. For example, the Theatre Kit software, issued in April 2002, which provides a relatively simple means of collecting data for the operating theatres topic for those trusts that do not have, or cannot utilise, their own theatre computer systems.

Accurate data are a key requisite for effective performance assessment. The electronic forms provided by the Audit Commission include validation checks to help trusts as they complete the forms. Many forms also include specially written validation software that provides error reports.

Auditors manage the data collection process locally and assist in checking the forms and dealing with any problems or queries that arise.

The comparative data that are collected are used to generate performance indicators that feed into the second stage of the portfolio – the diagnostic audit.

Diagnostic audit

Auditors carry out a performance assessment for each trust. Although based mainly on comparative data, it also takes account of the trust’s local circumstances so that the data are considered in an appropriate context. Auditors discuss preliminary results with trust staff before presenting reports and recommendations to senior managers at the trust. A plan of action to tackle any problems that have been identified is then drawn up by the auditor and agreed with the trust. Auditors will subsequently review progress.

In-depth audit

Based on the diagnostic, the auditor may recommend that in-depth audit work be carried out at the trust. This will only apply at a minority of trusts that have particular problems and require
help to tackle them. The work may consist of further detailed diagnostics and investigations of possible means of improvement.

National reviews

When trusts have commented on their performance assessments and amended the comparative data, if necessary, the Audit Commission produces national reviews of the results of the survey for each topic (BOX A). These highlight the key national issues and recommendations for each topic. Copies are circulated to relevant NHS trusts and other NHS bodies. Additional copies are available on request from the Audit Commission (see contacts section p10).

### Box A

Portfolio national review publications.

### National reviews for England and Wales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Date of publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Catering</td>
<td>Sep 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Accident and Emergency</td>
<td>Oct 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Ward Staffing</td>
<td>Nov 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Day Surgery</td>
<td>Dec 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Procurement and Supply*</td>
<td>May 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Medicines Management</td>
<td>Jun 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Radiology</td>
<td>Aug 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Medical Staffing</td>
<td>Aug 2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Covers England only

### National reviews for Wales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Date of publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Catering</td>
<td>Mar 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Procurement and Supply</td>
<td>Oct 2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparative data and software

The comparative data that is collected for each phase of the four topics is circulated to the trusts that took part, and to other NHS bodies, at about the same time as the reviews are published. This includes the Compare software that facilitates trusts’ use of the data by providing a simple and fast graphical output that can be based on any desired comparative groups.

The data and software for the first four topics in the portfolio (Catering, A&E, Day Surgery and Ward Staffing) have already been circulated to trusts and other NHS bodies on CD (April 2002). The data for Medical Staffing, Medicines Management, Procurement and Supply, and Radiology are being sent to NHS trusts in August 2002. Further copies of the CD can be obtained from the Audit Commission (see contacts section p10).

Website for trusts

All of the published reviews and information leaflets provided for trusts are available on the Portfolio website. It also includes material to support trusts’ use of the data and other resources for trusts:

- a guide to the Compare software;
- separate guides to the indicators for each topic (including specification of the basket of 25 procedures used for day surgery);
- good practice examples for some topics drawn from across the country; and
- management tools (for example, for Ward Staffing there is a ward-level staffing comparative tool and for A&E there is a tool for identifying bottlenecks in patient flows).

A frequently updated Excel file listing the documents that are currently available, with further details and links to the documents themselves, is available to download from the website.

1 http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/itc/acuteportfolio.shtml
Timetable for 2002/03

The timetable for the 2002/03 audit work (starting in November 2002) and current approximate planned issue dates for other portfolio products are summarised below (Box B). However, auditors agree individual plans with their trusts that might differ from the times given here in order to take account of local needs.

Box B
Key dates for the Portfolio 2002/03

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data collection for Phase 4 topics: Information and Records, Pathology, Therapists and Facilities Management. (Mandatory audit work at all relevant trusts)</td>
<td>Apr 2003 – Jul 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication of national reviews for Phase 3 topics.</td>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release of comparative data and software for Phase 3 topics to NHS trusts.</td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management tools for phase 3 topics added to website.</td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Links with other NHS work

The portfolio is closely linked to other audit work carried out by auditors on behalf of the Audit Commission. This includes monitoring the implementation of the Government’s NHS Plan (in England) and assessing the quality of routine data that are provided by trusts, both of which raise key performance issues. The NHS Plan work complements the portfolio by providing a different perspective. It concentrates on service targets, whereas the portfolio takes a broader perspective and looks at the use of resources and patients’ experiences. The work on data quality feeds directly into the portfolio wherever possible, by providing important indicators of the data quality to set alongside performance results.

The Audit Commission also carries out work on primary care, and other parts of the health economy, which is relevant to acute hospital services. This important cross-cutting information shows how the services provided by different parts of the NHS link together.

Disease-based topics (such as diabetes or coronary heart disease) or patient-based topics (such as maternity and children’s services) have not been included in the Portfolio. This is because they are covered by the joint Audit Commission/Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) work on monitoring National Service Frameworks (NSFs). Monitoring the implementation of the Coronary Heart Disease NSF will begin during the next year. Similarly, clinical governance and broader management-based issues are covered at most acute trusts as part of the regular CHI inspections.

All of these different pieces of work should add up to a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to measuring the performance of NHS acute services.

Where there have been potential overlaps with other organisations, the Audit Commission has sought to co-ordinate its work with them. Recent examples include:

- **Procurement and Supply** – data collection carried out jointly with the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency so that one data set can be used by both organisations.
- **Operating Theatres** – uses definitions and computer software for the data collection that are common to both the Audit Commission and the NHS Modernisation Agency.
- **Radiology** – uses the Keele/Newchurch workload categories which are well established in the service.
Contacts and more information

Website:
http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/itc/acuteportfolio.shtml

Helpline:
Tel: 020 7396 1258 or e-mail: ahportfolio-helpline@audit-commission.gov.uk

Copies of the national reviews (price £10 and £12) can be obtained from:
Audit Commission Publications, PO Box 99, Wetherby, LS23 7JA

Copies of the CD (see p7) can be obtained, free of charge, by contacting the helpline above.
If you are working in an NHS trust or authority, and would like to know more, please contact your local auditor. Further copies of this leaflet are available from:

Audit Commission Publications
PO Box 99, Wetherby, LS23 7JA

Freephone 0800 502030 stating stock code: HAP1831