QAA

Swansea University

MAY 2008

Institutional review

Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) exists to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education (HE) qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE.

To do this QAA carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In Wales this process is known as Institutional review. QAA operates similar but separate processes in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

The purpose of Institutional review

The aims of Institutional review are to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges are:

- providing HE, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard
- exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

Judgements

Institutional review results in judgements about the institutions being reviewed. Judgements are made about:

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

These judgements are expressed as either confidence, limited confidence or no confidence and are accompanied by examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

Nationally agreed standards

Institutional review uses a set of nationally agreed reference points, known as the 'Academic Infrastructure', to consider an institution's standards and quality. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), which include descriptions of different HE qualifications
- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- *Guidelines for preparing programme specifications,* which are descriptions of what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. They outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

The review process

Institutional reviews are carried out by teams of academics who review the way in which institutions oversee their academic quality and standards. Because they are evaluating their equals, the process is called 'peer review'.

The main elements of Institutional review are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution nine months before the review visit
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the review visit
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the review visit
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the review team five weeks before the review visit
- the review visit, which lasts five days
- the publication of a report on the review team's judgements and findings 22 weeks after the review visit.

The evidence for the review

In order to obtain the evidence for its judgement, the review team carries out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, such as regulations, policy statements, codes of practice, recruitment publications and minutes of relevant meetings, as well as the self-evaluation document itself
- reviewing the written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff
- talking to students about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the Academic Infrastructure.

The review team also gathers evidence by focusing on examples of the institution's internal quality assurance processes at work using 'thematic trails'. These trails may focus on how well institutional processes work at local level and across the institution as a whole.

Institutions are required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 04/05 *Information on quality and standards in higher education,* published by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.

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Summary

Introduction

A team of reviewers from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Swansea University (the University) from 12 to 16 May 2008 to carry out an institutional review. The purpose of the review was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers. To arrive at its conclusions the team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and to student representatives. It also read a wide range of documents relating to the way in which the institution manages the academic aspects of its provision. The words 'academic standards' are used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an academic award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK.

Academic quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for them. In institutional review both academic standards and academic quality are reviewed.

Outcome of the review

As a result of its investigations, the review team's view of Swansea University is that:

- confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

The review team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the intent and practice of the University's commitment to widening international student mobility as part of its engagement with the Bologna Process

- the development of an online database for the specification and approval of information on programmes and modules

- the widespread use of management information to inform discussion at all levels, together with the adoption of the Assessment Reports on the Quality of University Examinations and other data analysis tools

- the University's consideration of external examiner reports at institutional level

- the online process accessible to all staff for the tracking of postgraduate research students.

Recommendations for action

The review team considers it advisable for the University:

- to draw upon sufficient range of external expertise for the review panel to ensure that all discipline areas are adequately covered where a broad range of subject areas is brought together in a single periodic review

- to review the manner in which action plans arising from annual monitoring and

periodic review are drawn up and monitored in order to ensure that these plans are followed through in a transparent and coherent manner

- to review its Welsh language website and other information about the use of Welsh in order to ensure the sufficiency, accuracy and currency of the information therein.

The review team considers it desirable for the University:

- to review the membership and chairing of panels for periodic review in order to ensure the participation of a sufficiently wide range of University staff external to the faculty

- to review key quality and standards documents in order to ensure transparency to users in respect of consistency of terminology, dates of issue, and provenance.

National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings the review team also investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure that QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the review suggest that the institution has engaged effectively with subject benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice).*

Main report

Section 1: Introduction – Swansea University

1   An institutional review of Swansea University (the University) was undertaken from 12 to 16 May 2008. The purpose of the review was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the academic standards of its awards.

2   The review was carried out using a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). For institutions in Wales it replaces the previous process of continuation audit, undertaken by QAA at the request of Universities UK (UUK) and the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP). Institutional review also replaces assessments and engagements relating to the quality and standards of provision at subject level. The former were undertaken by HEFCW and the latter were undertaken by QAA on behalf of HEFCW as part of HEFCW's statutory responsibility for assessing the quality of education that it funds.

3   The review checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of academic awards from the University of Wales, of which Swansea University is an accredited institution; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of programmes of study leading to those awards; and for publishing reliable information. The scope of the review encompassed all of the University's provision and collaborative arrangements leading to University of Wales and Swansea University awards.

The institution and its mission

4   Swansea University is a research-led institution situated on a single campus at Singleton Park in Swansea. Its aim is to provide teaching and research of the highest quality, and, in collaboration with the Welsh Assembly Government, to become the driver of the knowledge economy in South-West Wales. This vision is reflected in its mission statement, which states, 'Swansea University will provide an environment of research excellence, with research being undertaken that is internationally recognised and that informs all other activities at the University. Swansea University will deliver an outstanding student experience, with teaching of the highest quality that produces graduates equipped for distinguished personal and professional achievement. The University community will be a powerhouse for growth in the regional economy, and will greatly enrich the community and cultural life of Wales. It will contribute to the health, leisure and well-being of citizens in South West Wales and beyond'.

5   As the University College of Swansea, the University received its Royal Charter in 1920 and became the fourth constituent college of the University of Wales. In 2007, building on the award of research and taught degree awarding powers in 2005, the University secured the Privy Council's approval of the new Supplemental Charter and supporting statutes that permitted it to become an independent institution with effect from 1 September 2007 with the name of Swansea University.

6   The University operates as an accredited institution within the confederal structure of the University of Wales. It continues to offer and award University of Wales degrees, although a few non-degree programmes are conferred in the name of Swansea University.

7   In July 2007, Swansea University had a student population of over 14,000, of whom 9 per cent were overseas students; approximately 88 per cent were undergraduates. The fastest growth is in the number of full-time overseas postgraduates, which almost trebled in the four years to 2007. Part-time students account for 24 per cent of the student population. Building on its vision of being a research-led institution, the University initiated a strategic directions review, to identify areas of research and recruitment strength that could be further enhanced. The approved outcome in 2004 was the creation of 10 schools with responsibility for academic and financial management, and the delivery of quality located within four faculties. These faculties are those of Arts and Humanities; Business, Economics and Law; Engineering and Science; and Health and Human Sciences. The faculties are responsible for maintaining academic standards and assuring the quality of learning and teaching. In addition, there is a fifth faculty, the Postgraduate Research Faculty, which has university-wide responsibility for all issues relating to postgraduate research provision, including quality assurance. Academic subject provision at the University was affected by changes brought about as a response to the HEFCW policy of Reconfiguration and Collaboration. In 2005, an exchange of students and staff took place, involving education transferring from the University to Swansea Metropolitan University. In return, the law and nursing provision of Swansea Metropolitan University was absorbed into the respective schools at Swansea University.

8   The University has adopted a strategic approach to increasing its Welsh-medium provision. This includes full programmes in the Department of Welsh, individual modules as parts of specific programmes in some schools, and Welsh-medium tutorial support in some occupational fields. The University is currently revising its Welsh Language Scheme, which was originally approved by the Welsh Language Board in 2004. The Use of Welsh Committee monitors the implementation of the Welsh Language Scheme.

Collaborative provision

9   The University has a relatively small volume of collaborative provision. This provision includes two franchised programmes in local further education colleges, consistent with the University's widening-access agenda; a joint graduate-entry programme with Cardiff University, leading to the Bachelor of Medicine degree of the University of Wales; collaborative postgraduate programmes as part of its international agenda and support for the Bologna Process; a number of facilitation agreements with institutions throughout the world as part of its drive to recruit overseas students; and exchange agreements to facilitate students' study mobility opportunities. The University has decided not to engage in major franchising or validation activities, believing in the benefits of its own campus-based student learning experience. Greater emphasis has been placed on developing collaborative degrees supported through the Bologna Process and the extension of student mobility opportunities through Erasmus and non-Erasmus agreements. The University has recently entered into an agreement with a specialist private education company to establish the International College of Wales at Swansea (ICWS), which will provide education for overseas students wishing afterwards to enter programmes at the University.

Background information

10   Information available for this review included:

- information on the University's website

- the previous Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) quality audit report for the University, published in 1999

- QAA subject engagement reports, the University's 2005 interim progress report to QAA, and the report of QAA's Review of postgraduate research degree programmes, 2006 (all unpublished)

- information on the websites of the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), Higher Education and Research Opportunities in the UK (HERO) and HEFCW. In addition, the University provided an institutional self-evaluation document. This self-evaluation document provided links to the report outcomes of other external reviews of the University's work. Subject areas involving professional, statutory and regulatory bodies include engineering, psychology, computer science, law, medicine, nursing, and other subjects related to medicine. During its visit, the review team was given access to the University's intranet and internal documents.

The review process

11   QAA conducted a preliminary visit in September 2007 to discuss operational aspects of the review. QAA received the self-evaluation document in February 2008. The review team visited the University on 1 and 2 April 2008 for the purpose of exploring with the Vice-Chancellor, senior members of staff and student representatives matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the self-evaluation document and other documentation provided for the team. During this briefing visit, the team signalled a number of themes for the review visit, including two thematic trails. The thematic trails selected by the team were in periodic review and school audit (separate and combined procedures), and in procedures surrounding closure of courses. A programme of meetings was developed, which was agreed with the University.

12   At the preliminary meeting for the review, the students of the University were invited, through their representatives, to submit a separate document, the student written submission, expressing views on the student experience at the University, and identifying any matters of concern or commendation about the quality of programmes and the standard of awards. The student representatives decided that they would provide a separate submission to the review team, and submitted this in February 2008.

13   The review visit took place from 12 May to 16 May 2008 and involved further meetings with staff and students of the University. The review team was Professor Clare Morris, Professor Paul Periton, Dr Chris Rivlin, Emeritus Professor Gareth Roberts, reviewers, and Ms Caroline Carpenter, review secretary. The review was coordinated for QAA by Mr Alan Bradshaw, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the previous quality audit

14   The last quality audit of the University took place as a QAA Continuation audit in 1999, and was followed by three QAA subject engagements in business and

management, law, and social policy and administration in 2002. Following the Continuation audit, the University submitted a progress report to QAA in November 2000; the Learning and Teaching Committee also reviewed further progress in January 2002 towards meeting the recommendations contained in the audit report. Many of the points for further consideration were afforded high priority by being included as specific objectives within the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, which it has monitored annually. The Interim Progress Report produced by the University in 2005 provided a comprehensive overview of the actions taken and structures established to enable the University to be satisfied that the recommendations made in the Continuation audit report had been addressed and resolved. Additionally, the University underwent a detailed scrutiny between 2002 and 2004 as a result of its application for degree awarding powers.

15   The heads of departments and schools in which subject engagements took place were required to submit an implementation plan in response to the key issues raised in the reports. The University's Institutional Facilitator in these engagements was also able to submit impressions of matters of institutional significance to the Learning and Teaching Committee. The University stated in its self-evaluation document that its responses to the subject engagement reports had been appropriate and thorough. Issues within the control of the Learning and Teaching Committee had been promptly addressed; issues outside the direct control of this Committee took longer to address, since these were largely concerned with resource availability. The review team was able to confirm that the University had engaged effectively with both the Continuation audit and subject engagement reports.

16   The QAA Review of research degree programmes, 2006, produced favourable outcomes for the University. A major point of consideration for the University was a resulting recommendation on the setting of a common minimum standard for the facilities available to research students in different schools. The University has, so far, not been able to agree the provision of standardised facilities for all postgraduate research students. Minimum standards of provision are to be determined at school level according to discipline requirements. The University is committed to enhancing the learning experience for research students, and, through the Postgraduate Research Faculty, is developing a skills programme to incorporate personal, professional and entrepreneurial acumen into the experience of all research students. Research students seen by the review team expressed satisfaction with the facilities available to them.

17   In support of the University's wider strategic aims, the University's internal 2004 Strategic Directions Review proposed a process of investment and disinvestment in various academic subject areas. A phased disinvestment was planned for certain subject areas, and a thematic trail undertaken by the review team indicated that the University had ensured the quality of the student experience during the phasing out of a programme.

18   Since 1999, the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, renamed for 2007-10 the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, has given clear institutional direction to enhancement of the student learning experience. An e-learning strategy is firmly included within the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The review team concluded that the University had continued to demonstrate its commitment to improvements in learning and teaching, and to their dissemination.

Section 2: The review investigations – institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the self-evaluation document

19   The University stated in its self-evaluation document that it had been energetic in the assurance of the quality and standards of its provision. This commitment has been demonstrated in the University's reaction to significant challenges and opportunities which have arisen since the 1999 quality audit. These include incorporating the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA, and the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* into its own academic framework; the implementation of the Strategic Directions Review; the conferment on the University of degree awarding powers and university title, and the change in its relationship with the University of Wales.

20   In the light of all these external policy developments and internal changes, the University has reviewed and refined its quality assurance procedures. It expresses confidence in these processes, and aims to expedite the integration of the amended procedures within the University's structures.

21   The University explained to the review team that it has a three-tier structure for assuring standards and quality. These tiers are corporate, faculty and school, and the structure is described in detail in the next section. At the highest of the levels, committees such as the Learning and Teaching Committee have a strategic role. The Committee provides a key quality-control function for the operation of quality assurance activities that are the responsibility of the faculties at the second level. Through periodic audit and review, this Committee also monitors school (third-level) adoption of the learning and teaching policy.

22   The faculty structure provides the second tier that, while informed by the constituent schools' planning process, remains independent of them for quality assurance purposes. Deans of faculties are an integral part of institutional quality assurance procedures, chairing, for example, school audits, periodic reviews and validations. They also facilitate the flow of information between the three tiers of the framework through cross-membership of first-tier committees while monitoring the implementation of the quality procedures within the schools.

23   The University stated in its self-evaluation document that this three-tier framework enables subject-level expertise to be utilised at the school level. In the view of the University, faculties provide strong externality and independence within a framework driven and overseen by institutional committees, with strong cross-representation drawn from across the whole institution. The University affirms that it provides a strong framework for the management of quality and standards; the assessors endorsed this view during the scrutiny leading to the granting of degree awarding powers. The University's assertion is further analysed by the review team in later sections of this report.

The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision

24   Senate has overall responsibility for academic matters. It has delegated some functions relating to quality assurance and enhancement to two key committees, the Academic Regulations Committee and the Learning and Teaching Committee, as well as to faculty committees which report to it.

25   The University's first tier of quality assurance and enhancement, operating at corporate level through the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Academic Regulations Committee, is overseen by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic), who chairs both committees. These two committees are the senior policy making bodies responsible for specifying university-wide procedures and guidelines.

26   The Learning and Teaching Committee is the principal committee having responsibility for: quality assurance arrangements; periodic and thematic review; the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, including e-learning; collaborative provision; and admissions, including special cases. It is supported in its duties by several subcommittees; the most important in quality assurance are those for admissions and collaborative provision.

27   The Academic Regulations Committee has principally a regulatory role in the maintenance and review of academic regulations; programme approval and withdrawal; academic appeals and student disciplinary matters; and in responding to international developments including the Bologna Process. The Teaching Quality Manual for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Programmes outlines the quality assurance and control mechanisms that assure teaching, learning and the student experience, and underpins the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.

28   The second tier at faculty level, including the Postgraduate Research Faculty, is responsible for monitoring the operation of quality assurance in schools. The Postgraduate Research Faculty ensures compliance with existing research regulations and procedures across all schools, and sets university-wide standards for the supervision of research students. It devolves some of its tasks to its subcommittees, one of which, the Faculty Board, considers the progress of research students and makes recommendations to Senate for the award of research degrees.

29   The third tier at school level delivers the detail of quality assurance and enhancement in the University. Schools carry out the annual monitoring of modules and programmes; make external examiner nominations for faculty scrutiny; develop new programmes, again for faculty scrutiny and validation. Schools are allowed some flexibility in organisational form, but are required by Senate to establish the following committees: School Executive; School Forum; Learning and Teaching; Research; and a student-staff consultative committee.

30   The success of the three-tier framework is dependent upon constructive alignment between the corporate, university-wide committees, the faculties and schools. This is facilitated by cross-membership of key committees. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) plays a major role in ensuring oversight of quality assurance and enhancement by chairing the major university-wide committees. The Pro Vice-Chancellor acts as a key liaison between the deans, the Academic Registry, schools and the senior management team, and is supported by the Academic Registrar and Senior Assistant Registrar (Quality). Deans act as a conduit between the first and second tiers through their membership of the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Academic Regulations Committee. Nominees may replace the dean on the former. Chairs of school learning and teaching committees are members of faculty committees, and so flows of information through the University on quality matters are maintained.

31   The Academic Regulations Committee conducts an annual review of assessment that examines the operation of university regulations, and award and progression boards for the teaching faculties. The faculty award and progression boards then

ensure the equitable application of these assessment regulations by endorsing the more detailed considerations produced by school examination boards. Similarly, the monitoring of research students by school research committees is then considered by faculty boards before any recommendation to Senate for the award of a research degree.

32   The Collaborative Provision Subcommittee is responsible for managing the University's collaborative activities. The Subcommittee reports to the Learning and Teaching Committee and uses, as its main reference point, the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA, and the University's Teaching Quality Manual, which outlines the procedures for the approval, review and withdrawal of collaborative activities.

33   The review team concluded that the framework for quality assurance and enhancement based upon the three-tier arrangement was sound in design and effective in operation.

The institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards

34   In recent years the University has revised its quality assurance procedures and introduced new ones in response to changing internal and external environments. The University is committed to continuous monitoring of its procedures, seeking feedback from users, reflecting on external best practice and making modifications. It will continue to monitor schools' responses to National Student Survey scores, and, following the expression of intention in its self-evaluation document,has introduced university-wide enhancement seminars on areas that may need attention such as assessment feedback. The review team learnt of examples of where this was happening. The University will further develop other aspects of its quality procedures. School academic audits have been found to be a useful assurance and enhancement vehicle, enabling staff to reflect on their practices, and consider the adoption of other perspectives. The University sees opportunities for extending this approach by the reintroduction of a self-evaluation to guide and inform auditors about practices in the schools. Likewise, thematic reviews, such as the review of assessment carried out in a language other than that of tuition, have proved successful in identifying needed improvements that cut across academic and administrative areas. These thematic reviews will be continued by the University.

35   The University has a commitment to widening its international profile, especially by outward student mobility and by selective developments with universities overseas. The University has instigated a thematic review into its expanding collaborative provision. Additionally, the Collaborative Provision Subcommittee has been reviewing existing contracts with a view to increasing international study opportunities. The University has explored the potential for converting discipline-based contracts into faculty or university-wide contracts, both within the European Higher Education Area and further afield. The review team learnt of well-developed support for student international mobility through Erasmus officers, disability provision, customised information packs, and the appointment of a Bologna Officer linked to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy priority for employability. These developments will take advantage of the strengths in language teaching at the University, and build upon its existing pastoral and academic support for incoming and outgoing students

at school level. The team formed the opinion that the intent and practice of such activities were sufficiently soundly based to be cited as an instance of good practice.

36   The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy was informed by the results of an internal and external review conducted by the Higher Education Academy in 2007 as a driver for a revised quality enhancement strategy. Among its aims are those to assure the validity and fairness of assessment processes; to support the transition to the world of work and further study; and to improve the student learning experience. This last aim is supported by the University's e-learning strategy. Within this strategy the 'Learning Lab' is a collaboration between schools and their subject areas on all aspects of e-learning. It provides a forum to formulate, discuss and disseminate ideas and good practice.

37   The University acknowledges that there is scope for improvements in the dissemination of good practice. The Learning and Teaching Committee, which is responsible for the dissemination of good practice, uses a range of devices to achieve this end. These include the Quality Matters newsletter, the Postgraduate Taught Forum and the University's virtual learning environment. Great emphasis is placed on the ability of the quality enhancement strategy to act as a catalyst for improvements in dissemination. The review team concluded that the University's intentions for the continued enhancement of quality and standards were soundly based.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Programme approval

38   Proposals for new programmes are initiated by schools, which are responsible for consideration of resources, alignment with business plans, and academic quality and standards. If approved by the school learning and teaching committee, proposals are scrutinised by the faculty committee, which may make recommendations for substantial revisions. Proposals approved in principle by the faculty are submitted to the Academic Regulations Committee, which establishes a validation panel, the internal members coming from a standing group of members of the Committee. An external subject specialist is an integral part of validation. Following a favourable report of the validation panel, final approval of the programme is confirmed by the Academic Regulations Committee. The outcome is reported to Senate. The review team learnt that those involved in validations are provided with detailed guidance. This guidance includes the need to ensure that learning outcomes reflect subject benchmark statements, and that standards are consistent with the appropriate level *of The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The University has four categories of changes to programmes of study, and determines the body responsible for approving them in each case. The faculty has an important role in amending programmes, and in introducing and amending modules. The team saw how this role operated effectively in practice. The processes for developing and approving new provision, and for modifying existing provision, are described in detail in the Teaching Quality Manual and supporting material.

39   In 2006, the University introduced an online method of recording proposed programme information. The review team heard how this method enabled proposals to be tracked and to be viewed by all staff, including external assessors, and any recommendations to be actioned. The University uses the information to generate a database of programme specifications for all active programmes and to draw up the

Diploma Supplements received by all graduating students. Module pro-formas are held in a similar manner, and are used to compile a module catalogue for use by incoming exchange students. The team formed the view that the development and use of this database constituted a feature of good practice.

40   The review team followed a thematic trail to explore the way in which the University had closed programmes in chemistry. In 2003-04, a Strategic Directions review, initiated by the Vice-Chancellor, had recommended a phased disinvestment in certain disciplines, which included chemistry. The University operates procedures for discontinuing programmes that are intended to ensure that students enrolled on a programme scheduled for closure are not disadvantaged. The team learnt that the University formulated an action plan to manage the closure, considered the matter at subject, faculty and institutional level, kept students fully informed over the implications of closure, especially with regard to the opportunities for reassessment, and that it examined the results profile of students to ensure that academic standards were maintained. The team also saw how procedures were operating properly for the routine withdrawal of programmes when initiated by schools, rather than by the University's central processes.

41   The review team was able to confirm that the University procedures for approving, amending and discontinuing programmes were well designed, well documented, and effective.

Annual monitoring

42   Annual monitoring of provision starts with module coordinators examining outcomes and reflecting on student feedback at module level. Programme directors, using the module-level reflection, are responsible for the annual monitoring of programmes against university-wide criteria. A report is completed on a standard form, and reviewed by the board of studies for the programme. Each school learning and teaching committee produces an executive summary of the reports, which outlines student involvement and responses to school issues. Since 2006-07, the faculty has considered the completed synopses for each school, reviewing the evidence and the effectiveness of the approach. The review team learnt that faculties had discussed their role, and had carefully considered the evidence that schools had provided. Reports from faculties are monitored by the University's Learning and Teaching Committee; institutional issues are identified and examples of noteworthy practice disseminated. The procedures for annual monitoring are set out in the Teaching Quality Manual. The team found that the purpose of annual monitoring, and the evidence that should be used, were clear and well understood.

43   Annual monitoring is facilitated by the use of specialist assessment reports on the Quality of University Examinations software. Staff are able to review the spread of marks and investigate any student's performance relative to the cohort. Monitoring reports for programmes can use this information to comment effectively on student progress and achievement. This practice contributed to the view of the review team that the widespread use of management information to inform discussion at all levels, allied to the adoption of the Assessment Reports on the Quality of University Examinations and other data analysis tools, was a feature of good practice.

44   The self-evaluation document explained that a significant element of annual monitoring concerns the production and oversight of action plans. The review team looked at examples of annual monitoring at programme and school level, and found

that action plans were not present in all cases. During the review visit, the team was told that this variability was partly due to the newness of this system, and that staff supported the process.

45   The review team concluded that annual monitoring was well documented and largely effective. However, it is advisable that the University should review the manner in which action plans arising from annual monitoring and periodic review are drawn up and monitored in order to ensure that they are followed through in a transparent and coherent manner.

Periodic review

46   The University adopted a revised process for the periodic review of programmes in 2006-07. This is largely school-based, with a requirement that all programmes are reviewed at least every five years. Programme directors prepare reports on a form, making use of a range of essential and recommended sources of information, which includes student admission and progression statistics, the adequacy of resources and the impact of national benchmarks. The board of studies initially approves the report, and is subsequently responsible for monitoring the action plan from the review. A programme review panel is convened, and considers the report and other information provided, meets students and staff, and makes recommendation on the future of the programme, which may include the requirement to make changes. A revised version of the report is received by the school learning and teaching committee. The University's Teaching Quality Manual states that, thereafter, 'the Faculty and the University's Learning and Teaching Committee monitors School responses and progress on addressing institutional issues respectively. The Faculty shall receive a summary of programme reviews conducted with the relevant issues highlighted. Institutional issues arising across the programme reviews shall be considered by Learning and Teaching Committee'.

47   The University also operates a timetable of academic audits of schools, based on the previous process of departmental audits, which is overseen by the Learning and Teaching Committee. The aims of a school audit are to assess supervision and management, to audit procedures and to advise the school on ways of enhancing its effectiveness.

48   During the visit, the review team followed a thematic trail to explore the ways in which periodic programme review and school audit were carried out. The team examined, as examples, a separate review and audit of the School of Law, and a combined review and audit of the School of Arts. The University procedures do not refer to the possibility of a joint periodic review and school audit but the self-evaluation document stated that schools may, if they wish, combine them. The team heard that, although the two processes generally look at different matters, there is some overlap and that, in particular, a combined event had been useful for the School of Arts, as it had only recently been formed as a single unit.

49   Under University procedures the internal staff on the review panel should be the Dean of Faculty or an alternate as chair, plus two members of the faculty. The review team observed that, in practice, the membership could also include University staff from another faculty. The team noted that in the case of the School of Law, where the chair of the panel was the Dean, the Dean was leading the review of programmes for which he also had other responsibilities. The team formed the view that such practice might reduce the independence of the chair. The team also noted that in the case of

the School of Arts where three out of four of the members of the panel representing the University beyond the School of Arts came from the other school in the faculty, the overall breadth of discipline of those reviewing the programmes was relatively narrow, and did not obviously reflect the perspective of the University as a whole.

50   The review team was informed that a report compiled by staff before the periodic review event took place, should be subsequently updated, to encompass an action plan. However, although the team saw some planning documentation, it was not able to confirm that a comprehensive plan for the School of Law had been compiled. As a consequence, the team was not clear how issues identified by the periodic review, such as the need to update programme specifications and to make fuller use of the upper range of marks, had been addressed. In contrast, where the periodic review was combined with a school audit of the School of Arts, the team saw a detailed plan with actions corresponding to all of the recommendations made by the panel. However, although this plan covered the issues arising from the periodic review, along with those from the school audit, it was based on the procedures for a school audit rather than those for the periodic review. When the team looked at the action plan subsequently produced by the School as part of the annual monitoring, it saw that it did not fully reflect the detail of the plan arising out of the periodic review that was conducted earlier in the year.

51   The review team tracked the progress of the action plans and found that some of the key documents produced as part of the periodic review of programmes had no author or date recorded. This made it hard for the team to determine how the periodic review process had been followed, and at what stage documents had been updated.

52   The review team concluded that the University's procedures for periodic review were, in general, clearly documented and largely effective. The team was able to confirm that, when the events for periodic review and school audit had been combined, with separate procedures for the two processes being carried out, the effectiveness of the events was not compromised. However, the team recommends that it is advisable for the University to review the manner in which action plans arising from annual monitoring and periodic review are drawn up and monitored, in order to ensure that they are followed through in a transparent and coherent manner. The team also recommends that it is desirable for the University to review the membership and chairing of panels for periodic review, in order to ensure the participation of a sufficiently wide range of University staff external to the faculty. The team further recommends that it is desirable for the University to review key quality and standards documents, to ensure transparency to users in respect of consistency of terminology, dates of issue, and provenance.

External participation in internal review processes

53   The University's requirements for external participation in programme approval are documented in its procedures. As part of programme development, initial proposals should be accompanied by an external opinion. At the final stage of approval, the validation panel must include an external subject specialist. The external specialist, who cannot be a current or recent external examiner, may be drawn from a pool of staff previously appointed by the University of Wales as a University subject representative, or may be nominated by the school. The external specialist is required to conduct an independent academic appraisal to determine whether the programme is of a sufficient standard to lead to the proposed qualification. Where schools are proposing substantial

changes to a programme, the opinion of an external assessor is necessary, and where the amendments affect more than three-quarters of the programme, a revalidation, which also involves an external subject specialist, is required.

54   According to the University's procedures, the panel for a periodic review should include an external assessor whose role is to 'ensure that the continuing programme remains consistent with external standards'. The self-evaluation document recognised that, in a school-based approach to periodic review, it would be necessary to involve external assessors from a variety of disciplines, for example languages and media in the School of Arts. However, the review team found that although programmes in the subject of Welsh, delivered in Welsh, were part of the periodic review of programmes from the School of Arts, there had not been an external assessor from that discipline on the panel. Additionally, the assessors had lacked a sufficient level of Welsh-language skill to enable them to scrutinise significant parts of the original documentation supporting those programmes. In the annual monitoring report for the Board of Studies for Welsh programmes, the comment was made that no member of the periodic review panel was qualified to express an opinion on that provision.

55   In meeting the review team, the University agreed that, although there had been on the panel an external language specialist, none of the external members was, in practice, able to understand material in Welsh. The team recorded that the University recognised the need for external specialists for all disciplines represented in a periodic review, and that, with the exception of Welsh, as discussed above, this had been the case in practice. The team concluded that, in general, the University had strong externality in programme approval and periodic review. However, the team recommends that, where a broad range of subject areas is brought together in a single periodic review, it is advisable for the University to draw upon a sufficient range of external expertise for the review panel, to ensure that all discipline areas are adequately covered.

Assessment practices and procedures

56   The University policy on assessment is set out in the Teaching Quality Manual and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The Academic Regulations Committee is responsible for the drafting and maintenance of the general assessment regulations and for ensuring that they are adhered to across the institution, and it consults faculties on these themes. The Academic Regulations Committee approves variations to the regulations at programme level, for example, in response to professional body requirements. It also carries out an annual review of assessment, which identifies actions to be undertaken. The review team was informed that the University is re-examining its assessment policy in the light of the revised section of the *Code of practice*. Staff and students are provided with academic handbooks on the regulations, which are published annually. Grade descriptors and the assessment methods and learning outcomes for each module are documented in school handbooks. The team was told by students that it was clear to them how they would be assessed, what was required of them, and how they should go about achieving the class of degree to which they aspired.

57   The University's Welsh Language Scheme entitles students who have been taught in English to be assessed in Welsh. The University's academic handbooks and the template for school handbooks give guidance to students on what they should do if they wish to be assessed in Welsh. However, the review team noted that this guidance

is not consistent. In 2006, the University carried out a thematic review on assessing in a language other than the language of tuition; the review took account of the guidance published by QAA. The review concluded that the 'mechanisms and procedures to support assessment in the medium of Welsh were adequate and fit for purpose'. Nevertheless, the University's thematic review also listed a significant number of recommendations, and made clear that the University was implementing its Welsh Language Scheme somewhat cautiously. The team was informed that a request sheet was being developed for students wishing to submit assessments in Welsh, and that this facility would be made available to students on the intranet for the start of the 2008-09 session. The team advises the University to review information provided to students about assessment through the medium of Welsh, in order to ensure the sufficiency and accuracy of that information.

58   The University operates a two-stage system to manage student progression and the award of qualifications. At the school stage, examination boards, attended by all external examiners, are held to determine student marks. School boards are presented with evidence of any mitigating circumstances relating to individual students that has been identified by the school special circumstances committees. The review team heard from students that they fully understand the process for submitting claims for personal mitigating circumstances. At the faculty stage, meetings of progression boards make decisions on progression, and meetings of award boards determine final awards including degree classification and are attended by a subset of the external examiners. The team noted that various statements given in the undergraduate assessment regulations about where marks were finally ratified were ambiguous. The University explained that the two-stage system facilitated the consideration of modular results, and was able to confirm that, despite some unclear statements in the undergraduate assessment regulations and the self-evaluation document, responsibilities for the confirmation of marks were clear in practice.

59   The University has also developed systems to check data used as part of the assessment processes. In its self-evaluation document, it notes that, in returning marks to the central database, schools double-check all data entry. These marks are further scrutinised by Academic Registry staff, who may query anomalous marks such as zero entries. These marks are then subject to overview by examination, award and progression boards. Following this, results letters are individually checked by Academic Registry staff as a final accuracy check, prior to their release to students.

60   The review team concluded that the University's procedures for assessment were mostly well-documented and were effective in practice. However, the team recommends that it is desirable for the University to review key quality and standards documents in respect of consistency of terminology, dates of issue, and provenance in order to ensure transparency to users.

External examiners and their reports

61   The procedures for the appointment of external examiners are set out in the Teaching Quality Manual. Nominations for external examiners are made by the head of school, considered by the faculty and further scrutinised by the chair of the Learning and Teaching Committee before formal approval and appointment. On occasion, this process has led to nominations being referred back for further information or to their not being approved. The University believes that the process works well, and the review team was able to confirm this. External examiners are expected to approve

examination papers and assessments, to endorse marks and assessment decisions, to comment on student achievement and the standard of awards, and to give an opinion on curricular development. They are provided with a range of documentation on assessment. Since 2004, the University has held induction events for external examiners, and feedback from them suggests that they are well received.

62   The process for the consideration of external examiners' reports is set out in the Teaching Quality Manual, and summarised in a flow chart. Reports are reviewed centrally for any immediate action that may be required, and are distributed to schools and faculties. Schools consider the reports at module and programme level, and draw up action plans. Responses from the schools are scrutinised by the faculty, and a synopsis prepared for the Learning and Teaching Committee, raising institutional issues and highlighting good practice. The review team learnt how matters raised by external examiners were considered by the Learning and Teaching Committee. The team found that the annual review of assessment by the Academic Regulations Committee included systematic and detailed consideration of issues identified in external examiners' reports, and the making of decisions to review relevant University policies. In 2007, the University carried out a thematic review of the external examining of taught programmes. The review made detailed reference to the *Code of practice,* and compared University procedures with each of the precepts on external examining. The principal finding was that the University has sound policies and procedures for external examining. The review also made recommendations, and, during the institutional review, the team learnt that these were being followed up by the Learning and Teaching Committee. The team formed the view that the thorough, systematic and detailed manner in which the University considered external examiners' reports at institutional level constituted a feature of good practice.

External reference points

63   External reference points used by the University in ensuring quality and standards fall into two main categories: the various elements of the Academic Infrastructure, and the inputs of professional and statutory bodies. In addition, the University is required to take note of the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales,* and is also, in view of its commitment to internationalisation, mindful of the provisions of the Bologna Process, notably the Dublin Descriptors and the three-cycle degree structure.

64   The self-evaluation document indicates that, to a large extent, the University's regulations and award structures are compatible with the requirements of these external frameworks, and, that where there are deviations, these are recognised and justified. For example, in order to protect its standards, the University admits students holding an HND qualification only to level 2 of its undergraduate programmes, although the level of the HND qualification as set within the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* would suggest that such students could be admitted to level 3. The University consulted the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* on this approach, and this body has authorised the variation.

65   Similarly, the regulations for some of the University's awards, notably the professional doctorates, integrated master's degrees (such as the MEng), and one-year master's, are currently under review by the University in the light of the Bologna Process and other external agendas.

66 As explained in the self-evaluation document, the University considered all sections of the *Code of practice* when these were initially issued, and has encouraged its staff to take part in activities such as benchmarking groups and the steering groups set up by QAA to prepare and revise sections of the *Code of practice*. Recent revisions to the *Code of practice* have been considered by a University committee, in some cases by means of a thematic review. The University has developed an online database of programme specifications, which is used by staff when making amendments to programmes, and will also be made available students to help inform their choices of programme and modules.

67 The team considered that the University had been slow in responding to the revised versions of some sections of the *Code of practice*, for example, the revised edition of *Section 6: Assessment of students*, was issued in September 2006 but was being considered by the University only during 2007-08.

68 Use of both benchmark statements and the FHEQ figures strongly in the University's quality assurance processes. For example, the guidance given on the form for submission of a programme specification makes reference to the FHEQ, and both benchmark statements and the framework are mentioned in the handbook 'Approving new taught programmes of study'. Newly appointed external examiners are sent a copy of subject benchmark statements in their appointment pack, which also references the FHEQ, while the form for external examiner reports specifically requires them to address the extent to which the provision meets the benchmark statement(s). Procedures for periodic review also require confirmation that the elements of the Academic Infrastructure have been addressed. The team came to the conclusion that the University has paid due attention to all elements of the Academic Infrastructure.

69 The self-evaluation document indicated that responsibility for detailed consideration of professional, statutory and regulatory body reports on programmes has been delegated to faculties. The review team noted a template which is provided so that school-level responses to such external reports are provided to the faculty dean in a standard format. Each faculty then produces a brief report for the Learning and Teaching Committee, identifying both items of good practice and any general issues that might require university-level consideration. The self-evaluation document acknowledged that dissemination of good practice cited in external accreditation reports presents a challenge. However, some progress has been made in this area, and is discussed below.

70 A wide range of professional body reports was made available to the review team. These covered a broad range of disciplines, including engineering, health, business and management. The conclusions of the reports were overwhelmingly positive, with aspects such as good relationships with employers and the strong research input into teaching receiving praise.

71 The review team saw evidence of consideration of the reports at all levels of the committee structure. It is also clear that professional bodies' requirements are considered when new provision is being designed, and that the reports of professional bodies' visits inform annual monitoring reports and periodic review. In summary, the team found the University's view of its processes for consideration of professional bodies' reports, as expressed in the self-evaluation document, to be accurate, and formed the view that these processes were thorough and sound.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

72   Since the last QAA audit of the University in 1999, there have been three QAA reviews at subject level, in Law; Social Policy and Administration; and Business and Management. Action plans responding to any issues in the review reports were produced by heads of department or schools, and monitored by the University's Learning and Teaching Committee. The self-evaluation document identified the institutional issues that arose and the University's response.

73   In 2005-06, the University underwent a QAA Review of research degree programmes. The outcome was a judgement that the institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree provision was satisfactory. The review recommended that the institution might wish to consider the setting of a common minimum standard for facilities available to research students in schools. The review team for the Institutional review learnt that the Regulations Working Group had been asked to examine the current regulations for research degrees, and to compare them with those at other institutions. The team heard that the University had found the Review of research degree programmes useful, and that it had provided an opportunity to reflect on the efficiency and purpose of handbooks and induction events.

74   Responsibility for the detailed examination of professional bodies' reports and for ensuring that schools respond promptly, and fully, lies with faculties. The process is clearly described in the Teaching Quality Manual. The review team was able to confirm that reports from faculties are examined by the University's Learning and Teaching Committee to identify institutional issues, including examples of good practice. The team concluded that the University's procedures for programme level review and accreditation by external agencies were well documented and effective.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

75   Students are involved in committees at all levels of the University, from course representatives on school and departmental consultative committees to Students' Union officers who sit on Senate, Council and other central university committees. Relations between the Students' Union and the University are regarded as a particular strength of the University's systems by both students and staff. Particularly noteworthy are the monthly meetings held between the University's senior management and the Students' Union sabbatical officers; these are chaired alternately by the Vice-Chancellor and the President of the Students' Union. Students were able to provide examples of issues that had been discussed at this meeting and where they have seen effective action taken by the University; these tended to relate primarily to operational matters such as the opening hours of libraries.

76   The Students' Union invites all course representatives to a termly course representatives' assembly, at which training materials prepared by the Students' Union are distributed. The University has recently introduced a training day for Students' Union sabbatical officers, aimed at ensuring that the latter have a good understanding of the relationship and function of the committees on which they will serve.

77   Representation for postgraduate research students is achieved primarily through the student-staff assembly of the Postgraduate Research Faculty, made up of student representatives from schools and departments.

78   In addition to formal student representation on committees, the self-evaluation document cited many other aspects of the University's quality assurance processes in

which students are involved. These include periodic programme reviews and school audits, professional body accreditations and working groups.

79   Student representatives whom the review team met during the briefing visit, and who had been involved in the writing of the student written submission, confirmed the very positive view of staff-student relations expressed therein. Scrutiny of minutes of the University's committees suggested that student representatives exist at all levels of the University's structures, although on some committees, particularly those at university level where a number of Students' Union representatives were involved, the full complement of representatives did not always attend. Nevertheless, it was clear that, across the University, ample opportunities existed for students to make their views known.

80   The student written submission stated, 'Our overwhelming view is that the student voice at Swansea University is listened to and that students play a significant part in contributing to University policy and practice'. The evidence seen by the review team confirmed that this statement is accurate.

Procedures for student complaints and appeals

81   Following devolution of powers from the University of Wales, and the introduction of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, the University reviewed its appeals and complaints procedures. Among other changes, this resulted in the introduction of an additional stage in the appeals and complaints procedures, whereby a student who is not satisfied with the outcome of an appeal or complaint may submit a final case to the Academic Registrar. The University maintains close contact with national developments in this area, including the *Code of practice, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters,* and a number of special interest groups. The University cited as evidence of the effectiveness of the procedure the fact that in no instance has the Office of the Independent Adjudicator found against the University.

82   All regulations related to complaints and appeals are easily accessible to students and staff on the University's web pages. The Students' Union provides advice and support to students who wish to make a complaint or to appeal, and Students' Union officers indicated that very good relationships exist between the Academic Registrar's office and the Students' Union in this area, with all parties taking steps to ensure that students are clearly informed of rights, responsibilities and procedures. The students endorsed the view, expressed by the University in the self-evaluation document, that, while there is always room for improvement, the handling of complaints and appeals by the University constitutes a strength of its provision.

83   Information on appeals and complaints procedures is available in Welsh and in English, and students may make written submissions in Welsh. However, the review team was informed by staff that it was not made entirely clear to students that they have a right to conduct their part in any hearing in Welsh, although staff believed that if a student requested this, the request would be accommodated. The team learnt that the University plans to address this issue, and to make this right to a bilingual hearing explicit in its assessment regulations for 2008-09. The team found the University's processes for dealing with complaints and appeals to be generally rigorous, explicit and transparent.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

84   The mechanisms for obtaining feedback from students through the student representative system have been discussed above. Feedback from individual students on modules and courses is also gathered by surveys. There is an expectation that all lecturers will carry out evaluation at the module level. The University provides a suggested module review pro-forma; the review team was informed that its use was advisory rather than mandatory. There is, therefore, some variation across the University in the way that module feedback is gathered.

85   While feedback is collected by module lecturers, it is not confidential to them, being shared at least with the head of school, and helping to inform development plans. Students whom the review team met were familiar with the process; they expressed the view that 'questionnaire fatigue' might be experienced by students.

86   Feedback on the student experience as a whole is obtained through an internal survey, the Omnibus Survey, carried out by the Students' Union in conjunction with the University. The student written submission acknowledged that response rates in this survey have been disappointing, citing software problems for online respondents as one possible reason. The review team was able to view the survey online, and noted the large number of questions (in excess of 50) in the survey.

87   The University has also addressed the results of the National Student Survey by setting up a subcommittee of the Learning and Teaching Committee, the National Student Survey/Omnibus Survey Outcomes Subcommittee, to review the results of these two surveys at institutional level, and to ensure that outcomes are being adequately addressed at subject level.

88   Other surveys, both formal and informal, are carried out on aspects of the student experience; Library and Information Services carries out its own annual survey, as well as providing comment boxes for more occasional feedback. Similar processes exist in other central departments.

89   Students whom the review team met during both briefing and review visits confirmed the opinion, expressed in the student written submission, that the University is vigorous in responding to matters raised in student feedback, and were able to cite examples where this had taken place. One example quoted in the student written submission concerned a request from students in several subject areas for more interaction with personal tutors; the University had responded to this by issuing a personal tutors' handbook with guidelines on the amount of contact that should take place between students and personal tutors. Students had observed that this introduction had produced the desired improvement in the situation. Another example was seen by the team in its study of documents that concerned the recent closure of chemistry provision; students in the final cohort of the chemistry programmes had complained that subscriptions to key chemistry databases had been terminated prematurely, with a consequent effect on their studies. The University had responded by reinstating the databases.

90   Feedback from graduates and from employers was less evident to the review team. The self-assessment document was silent on this theme, and while it is clear from its public website that Swansea has an active alumni organisation, the review team saw no evidence that the body of alumni is used as a source of feedback or input to quality processes.

91   Views of employers in major professional areas impact indirectly on provision through the mechanisms of accreditation by professional bodies. The reports of recent accreditations to which the review team had access made it clear that those views are taken very seriously by the relevant departments. The team came to the conclusion that the opportunities for students to provide feedback on their experience provided by the University are satisfactory, and that the University at all levels is responsive to that feedback.

Student admissions and the use made of progression and completion statistics

92   The University makes extensive use of management information, including progression and completion statistics, to inform quality management and strategic decision-making at both local and institutional level. In particular, the the Assessment Reports on the Quality of University Examinations tool, which was developed within the School of Business and Economics and then extended as good practice across the University, provides a powerful mechanism whereby students' performance across their programme can be analysed and commented upon. Such commentary is required as part of the annual monitoring of modules and programmes and the periodic review of programmes, and clear templates are provided by the University to assist schools in interpreting the data provided.

93   The review team was informed that, on request, additional help was available to academic staff who needed to access the data as part of the preparation of reports deriving from the annual monitoring of modules and programmes. Staff also confirmed that the data provided centrally were regarded as both reliable and comprehensive, and that schools and faculties therefore tended to make use of this information rather than maintaining local databases. The University has recently strengthened the statistics section of the Administrative Computing Unit, in order to provide greater depth of statistical analysis to support the work of the University's committees.

94   The review team was given access to the University's intranet, and confirmed that the analyses available to staff for examining student performance are extensive and easily accessible, extending across the full range of undergraduate, taught postgraduate and postgraduate research degrees. The software enables schools to trace the performance of entry cohorts, for example students admitted from Compact Schools, that have a special relationship with the University as part of the access and widening participation agenda. The team learned that future plans included the use of the system to track international entrants. The team was also given access to a tool that enables staff to view summaries of the progress of research students, classified by academic unit, and which include such data as main supervisor and time to completion.

95   The review team saw substantial evidence of the integration of management information into consideration of policy at all levels. This evidence included minutes from faculty boards that commented on the use of the the Assessment Reports on the Quality of University Examinations software in the moderation of marks; minutes from the Learning and Teaching Committee showing consideration of reports on trends in degree classification 2001-07; and a progress report on the distribution, use of and response to statistical information, in which progress on the recommendations of the recent thematic review of the use of statistical information was tracked.

96   Overall, the review team was of the view that the widespread use of management information to inform discussion at all levels, together with the adoption of the Assessment Reports on the Quality of University Examinations and other data analysis tools, constitutes a feature of good practice. The team also formed the opinion that the online process accessible to all staff for the tracking of postgraduate research students constituted a further feature of good practice.

Assurance of the quality of teaching staff: appointment, appraisal and reward

97   The University's recruitment and selection procedures were revised in 2004-05 with the explicit aims of improving ratings in the national Research Assessment Exercise, and of ensuring that teaching is research-led. The self-evaluation document indicated that this strategy has been successful. Newly appointed staff are normally expected to complete a three-year probationary period, and personal performance reviews which take place during this period refer, among other sources of data, to feedback from students on teaching. Staff on probation are allocated a more experienced colleague who acts as mentor; helpful guidance on mentoring is provided; and training is available for mentors. Clear guidance is provided about the process and the aims of probation.

98   The responsibility for induction of newly appointed staff rests partly with central departments and partly with the individual's subject department. Clear guidance is provided on the responsibilities of each, and the review team saw evidence that the induction process is monitored. Staff whom the team met during the visit confirmed that their experience of induction and mentoring was in line with the published information.

99   The self-assessment document indicated that all probationary staff who have not previously completed a teaching training course are required to attend the two training courses delivered by the Staff Development Unit. The two courses, collectively described as 'Introduction to University Teaching', are each of 1.5 days duration. There is also a course on teaching in higher education, accredited by the Higher Education Academy, run in collaboration with other Welsh higher education institutions, on which new staff are invited to enrol; 37 staff from 10 academic areas have embarked on this course since 2004. It emerged in discussion during the review visit that the level of relief from teaching given to staff undertaking training for teaching varies between schools.

100 Postgraduate research students who are engaged in teaching or demonstrating are required to attend a dedicated course provided by the Staff Development Unit. They are paid for attendance at this course unless teaching is part of their contractual duties.

101 The University has recently replaced the range of appraisal systems, which applied to various groups of staff by a single unified performance review procedure. This began in January 2008, and the outcomes will be subject to evaluation. Detailed guidance on the review process is available, including a protocol on when a reviewer requires training.

102 Various routes are available for recognition of those staff with exceptional records in the area of teaching and learning. These include a Distinguished Teaching Award scheme, for which nominations may be made both by students and staff. There is also a route for promotion to senior lectureship primarily on the basis of teaching

excellence, although this still includes a significant research threshold, and could not be construed as a purely teaching route to promotion. Professorial promotion processes make little mention of teaching, and are based on traditional research criteria. Students whom the review team met were well aware, and appreciative, of the extent to which their learning was informed by current research.

103 Overall, the evidence seen by the review team is that processes for assuring the quality of teaching staff through appointment, appraisal and reward are more than adequate, and are, as the self-evaluation document suggested, appropriate, given the research-led nature of the University's strategy.

Assurance of the quality of teaching staff through staff support and development

104 Staff support and development are provided primarily through the Staff Development Unit, although other departments also have a role. For example, a range of training on quality processes is provided by the Academic Registry, and staff indicated that this training was regarded as very helpful. Responsibility for oversight of staff development policy rests primarily with the Human Resources Policy Committee, and evidence provided by the minutes of this Committee indicates that the University is active in the provision of staff support and development. For example, the new Professional Review and Development Policy agreed in late 2007 has already been implemented, and the University has adopted a strategic approach to the development of those with management roles.

105 Discussions with staff confirmed that staff development is initiated at many levels of the University. Development facilities include central provision of some generic courses and funding such as the Individual Training Fund, which can support staff to attend external courses. The review team also learned of a scheme, run by the University with Swansea Metropolitan University, that allows staff of both institutions (including staff in compact schools associated with the universities) to undertake part-time study at no charge.

106 In addition to more formal courses, the Staff Development Unit arranges events for the dissemination of good practice and the sharing of ideas. These include, for example, the Lunch and Learn workshops.

107 The self-evaluation document indicated that schools are 'strongly recommended' to adopt one of two models for peer teaching review, as set out in the Teaching Quality Manual. However, while staff confirmed that peer review does take place, the University does not monitor centrally the implementation of the process, nor ascertain which of the two recommended models are in use in which areas of the institution.

108 The review team found the monitoring of staff development activity to be thorough, with detailed statistical information on take-up rates, per-head expenditure and other data being provided annually to the Human Resources Policy Committee. Overall, the team formed the view that a good range of staff development activity was available, and that the University took a sufficiently strategic approach to the provision of development and support for staff.

Assurance of the quality of teaching delivered through distributed and distance methods

109 The self-evaluation document made no direct reference to teaching delivered through distributed and distance methods. In discussions with staff, the review team learned that there were few courses at the University that employed distributed and distance learning. Examples of those that did, included blended learning within courses leading to a Certificate in Higher Education delivered by the Department of Adult Continuing Education, and some courses within Health Science delivered at two external sites. The team was told that quality assurance procedures applied equally to such provision as to any other programmes. The Library and Information Services also offers some specially designed services, known collectively as DALLAS (Distance And Lifelong Learners At Swansea), for students who require support at a distance.

110 The distance learning offered by the Department of Adult Continuing Education is primarily community-based, with over 90 per cent of its teaching taking place off-campus. The Department provides learning supported by information and communication technologies through its Connecting Communities Cymru project and its Community University of the Valleys project. It provides opportunities for progression from introductory sessions to accredited courses, including a part-time degree programme delivered entirely in community venues.

111 In its self-evaluation document, the University explained that the Department of Adult Continuing Education is qualitatively different from other schools, operating as the principal arm of the University for widening access. It functions as a department rather than as a school within the Faculty of Health and Human Sciences. The disciplines offered by the Department are not confined to those within its parent Faculty, but the Faculty provides a quality assurance framework for the Department's courses similar to that provided for schools in general.

112 The 2004 *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* was noted by the University's Learning and Teaching Committee and its Collaborative Provision Subcommittee. The minutes of those meetings confirmed that the publication of this section had been drawn to the attention of relevant staff.

Learning support resources

113 In its self-evaluation document, the University stated that a key component in its learning strategy is to 'provide a modern, flexible learning environment that supports different modes of learning'. The principal document that informs the development of the University's policy is its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. Within this framework other strategies play key roles: an estates strategy that identifies improvements to the physical learning environment; an e-learning strategy, an information and communication technologies strategy; an information literacy strategy, and a strategic plan for the University's integrated Library and Information Services.

114 The University operates a central booking system for its pool of large lecture theatres, and achieves a utilisation rate of over 50 per cent. The Estates Strategy is informed by the deliberations of a learning environment user group, an informal working group of the Learning and Teaching Committee that monitors improvements in the standard of teaching rooms. In its self-evaluation document, the University stated that this group has noted the small number of lecture theatres that have the

capacity for accommodating increasing student numbers. In order to address this issue, the University is exploring options for the further development of its current campus, as well as the possibility of establishing a second campus.

115 One focus within the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2007-10 is on supporting e-learning as a tool in learning and teaching. The e-Learning Strategy was revised in 2006, placing a greater emphasis on the learning experience rather than technological provision. Development and implementation of this strategy, including the development of related quality assurance guidelines, is undertaken by an e-learning subcommittee that reports regularly to the Learning and Teaching Committee. The development is also supported by an informal user group, the Learning Lab, that, in the expression of the self-evaluation document, 'provides a forum to discuss, formulate and disseminate ideas and good practice, and an area where learning and teaching, rather than the technology itself, drive the process'.

116 The implementation of the virtual learning environment strategy is promoted by a team of three e-learning technologists, and supported by Learning and Teaching Strategy - funding provided by HEFCW. The review team was informed that there are now over 1,600 virtual learning environment modules in the University, and that collaboration with other institutions in the region is being funded by HEFCW to establish a joint e-learning centre of excellence. In discussions with staff, the team was told that there remained some variability across the University in the use of the virtual learning environment, and that support was being provided to assist schools in further developing their e-learning policies, with a preference for engaging individual members of academic staff in a 'bottom-up' rather than a 'top-down approach'. The team was also told that the e-Learning Subcommittee would be seeking to benchmark provision at the University against the sector.

117 The Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Strategic Plan is developed by an ICT Strategy Committee reporting to the University's Management Board. In its self-evaluation document, the University noted that the Plan is updated annually and includes the student learning experience as a key element. It stated that a PC to student ratio of 6:1 is maintained through HEFCW Capital Funding for Learning and Teaching and Information Technology Infrastructure. There is increasing investment in laptop computers rather than fixed computers, and the Library and Information Services has developed a system whereby 100 wireless-enabled laptops can be borrowed by students for up to a week. The Plan recognises that ICT is a key element in a Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund grant from HEFCW, the cornerstone of which is a student record system shared with other higher education institutions in south-west Wales. It also foresees an extension of a shared virtual learning environment and collaborative library and careers systems. Further shared teaching is envisaged, particularly in the context of e-learning. The Plan also identifies the importance of HEFCW funding in maintaining the current range of core services and facilities, and recognises that the University needs to bring its level of central information and communication technology expenditure up to that of competitor institutions.

118 The Information Literacy Strategy was adopted in 2007. It draws upon a definition of information literacy as the set of skills and abilities that a person needs to be able to recognise when information is needed and the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively that information. In 2007-08, the University is piloting information literacy support in collaboration with selected schools, leading to an evaluation of the pilot, with the aim of including information literacy in an increasing number of taught programmes.

119 In its self-evaluation document, the University reported that the Library and Information Services recognises the importance of quality assurance procedures. It achieved a Charter Mark award in 2006, renewed in 2007, in recognition of its processes. It emphasises the importance of services for students, and maintains links with schools via a system of subject librarians. It is subject to external validation, and conducts regular customer satisfaction surveys. Its policies are also influenced by two consultative groups, a library user group and a computer and media user group, described to the review team as 'sounding boards'. Minutes of both user groups are reported to the Information and ICT Committee. The library has been refurbished and redesigned, and its opening hours extended significantly, to include experimental 24-hour opening during examination periods.

120 The University concluded in its self-evaluation document that 'LIS support has been recognised as responsive to user needs' and stated that 'e-learning provision is a strength and will be further developed through [HEFCW's] Reconfiguration agenda'. Surveys undertaken by the Library and Information Services show that students are generally satisfied with the service provided. Comments made by students to the review team confirmed that view and emphasised the high visibility of the services offered. They also showed that students are particularly pleased at the University's responsiveness to their wishes to achieve 24-hour opening of the library during examination periods.

121 The review team recognises that the University has made significant advances in providing resources to support learning, funded in part by grants from HEFCW in response to its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and as part of the Welsh Assembly Government's Reconfiguration and Collaboration agenda. It has, in particular, been responsive to student needs, and continuously evaluates its performance.

122 The University has adopted an incremental approach to the expansion of its virtual learning environment, emphasising its potential enhancement of the learning experience of students. The review team noted that the University is continuing to refine and develop its methodology, drawing on best practice within the sector so as to shift gradually from informal encouragement to the full integration of e-learning in its overall Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

123 In its self-evaluation document, the University stated that 'schools are responsible for providing students with all the information necessary to support them through their studies. This information is primarily contained within Programme Handbooks, which follow a University-wide template to promote consistency of information provided to students across the University'. A template provides guidance to schools on what to include. It covers the mission and objectives of the University and the school, school structure, examination and assessment matters (including policies relating to plagiarism, appeals, extenuating circumstances, late submissions and awards and progression rules), employability, obligations on students, University support for students, a section on Studying at Swansea (including programmes of study, outline of programme specifications, transcripts and Diploma Supplements, personal tutors), and a section on module content (including teaching methods, methods of assessment and learning outcomes, details of modules offered by the school, core modules, compulsory modules, marking schemes and re-assessment).

124 The template also includes a section in both English and Welsh referring to the University's Welsh Language Scheme. This sets out the student's rights to be assessed through the medium of Welsh, and the procedures that need to be followed by a student to exercise those rights.

125 The review team was informed that the Academic Registry conducts periodic reviews of handbooks to ensure conformity with the template and that it regularly circulates examples of good practice. The team read a sample of programme handbooks and concluded that, while the handbooks took account of institutional guidance, there were significant variations in the level of detail provided, in relation both to the support available to students and to aspects of assessment guidelines. The team was told that, in one case, a school audit process had itself identified internal disparities that were subsequently addressed. The team noted the University's intention to continue to monitor school handbooks in order to ensure equality in the information provided to students.

126 In its self-evaluation document, the University stated that one school is pioneering the provision of handbooks and other course materials in a CD-ROM format that can be updated using hyperlinks to documentary sources and the school website. The University intends to promote this approach across the institution.

127 The University's policy on personal tutoring for undergraduates and taught postgraduates is set out in academic handbooks, published in bilingual format. The University requires all undergraduate and taught postgraduate students to be assigned a personal tutor. The role of the personal tutor in providing academic guidance is limited, as defined in the handbooks, and students are encouraged to discuss matters of course work with their course tutors. The handbooks suggest that problems that affect a student's work overall, are best discussed with the personal tutor, who can advise on an appropriate course of action. The academic handbooks are detailed, comprehensive documents. The role of the personal tutor is also set out in programme handbooks, albeit that there is some variation across schools in the detail provided. Students met by the team were clear about that role, and tended to seek advice on academic matters from their course tutors in the first instance.

128 In its self-evaluation document, the University also stated that regular training for personal tutors is provided by Staff Development and delivered by an external expert. The review team was told that responsibility for overseeing and monitoring the personal tutor system rests at school level. In order to support its personal tutor system, the University has more recently published a personal tutors' handbook. This handbook is more explicit in distinguishing between the role of a personal tutor and an academic tutor, the latter being defined as a member of academic staff from the school offering the relevant programme of study to whom a student may turn with academic queries. Staff met by the team were clear regarding their role as personal tutors and their responsibilities to refer students to other support services as necessary.

129 The University's current guidelines on placement learning were developed to take account of the *Code of practice*. In its self-assessment document the University noted that it has convened a work-based and placement learning task group to consider the revised section of the *Code*, and to promote good practice in this area.

130 The University stated that 'the increasing range of professionally-linked programmes within the institution has led to substantial development of practice-led and practice-based teaching'. Examples provided to the review team showed a wide

range of experience coupled with an institutional desire to disseminate good practice across schools.

131 The University also reported that external examiners' reports identify the significance of practice-led teaching and placement learning experience in enabling students to integrate theory and practice, and their impact on employability. Students comment positively on the value of placement learning and practice-led teaching in the application and contextualisation of their knowledge. More generally, students who met the review team confirmed the view expressed in the student written submission that they experienced a supportive learning environment and appreciated the academic guidance that was provided.

132 As part of its response to QAA's Review of research degree programmes in 2005-06, the University has introduced a process of induction to meet the needs of part-time research students to complement that already available for full-time students. In the light of these changes, coupled with the devolution of regulatory powers from the University of Wales, the University is also rewriting its handbook for research supervisors.

133 In its self-evaluation document, the University affirmed that the Postgraduate Research Faculty facilitates a favourable learning environment for research students by overseeing quality assurance mechanisms for the supervision of research students; offering supervisory training for all new supervisors; regular monitoring and review of research student progress; providing a comprehensive induction programme to all new research students; and, coordinating a skills development programme that forms an integral part of the research student experience. A particular feature of the University's monitoring of research students is its online process to track student progress and with the further aim of ensuring the equitable treatment of students. The review team considered that this facility represented a particular feature of good practice.

134 A skills development programme for research students is delivered through research activity days, short courses, and online resources. There is liaison with the Careers Service and Library and Information Services, with specialist short courses offered to research students through both these services. Students met by the review team appreciated the comprehensiveness of this programme, and expressed their general satisfaction with the academic support that they received.

135 In the self-evaluation document, the University stated that the Postgraduate Research Faculty aims to embed personal, professional, career development and entrepreneurial acumen into the experience of all research students. The review team noted that the University recognises that further development is required to bring the aim to fulfilment.

136 The review team considered that, on the basis of the evidence available to it, the University provides a good level of academic guidance, support and supervision and seeks to enhance its provision in a measured and systematic way.

Personal support and guidance

137 The University has consolidated its Student Support Services to form, under one line-management structure, a single resource comprising the Student Services Directorate, Student Counselling, the Money Advice and Support Office, Residential Services, English Language Training Services, the Disability Office, and the International Student Advisory Service. In its self-evaluation document, the University

stated that the integration of Student Services into a single department with only two office locations has been beneficial for students. The student written submission praised accessibility of the services, and students met by the review team commented favourably on their visibility.

138 Among the features of Student Support Services highlighted in the self-evaluation document are the services provided by a Recording Centre for the Blind. The Centre provides visually impaired students in Wales with texts in their preferred format, and is linked with the Royal National Institute of Blind People. It has a network of over 100 volunteers and produces on average 10,000 pages of Braille each year, and 1,000 hours of new recordings, of which almost half are archived by this Institute. The Centre records lecture notes, handouts, extracts and other material as required, using a storage system that enables students to navigate quickly within the material. In its self-evaluation document, the University reported that feedback from students indicates that this system has reduced reading time required by more than 40 per cent, due to this ease of navigation compared with the more traditional recording format.

139 Apart from assistance for those with visual disability, practical support measures are provided by a disability support librarian and an IT support officer to ensure access to IT services. There is support for students with learning difficulties including dyslexia, dyspraxia, dysgraphia and hyperlexia.

140 The Disability Office arranges volunteer support workers for students in need of human assistance. The review team was informed that there are currently 19 full-time volunteers on-campus who attend a compulsory residential training week before the start of the academic year. There was also recognition of the financial challenges faced to ensure the long-term sustainability of such support over the whole period of a student's programme.

141 Students met by the review team cited examples of support provided by the Disability Office that had materially affected the work and wellbeing of their peers. The team concluded that the University has comprehensive arrangements for supporting students with disabilities.

142 The International Student Advisory Service provides information and advice on non-academic matters, including immigration advice to international students and their dependants, and coordinates an orientation programme for these students. In the student written submission, students praise the approachability and availability of the service.

143 A score of International English Language Testing System 6.0, Test of English as a Foreign Language 550 or equivalent is normally required for entry to Level 1 of the University's undergraduate degree programmes. Within the University, English Language Training Services provides a full-time course specifically designed for international students who need to improve their English before entering a UK university at foundation, undergraduate or postgraduate level, or who wish to improve their level of general English with a more academic focus. English Language Training Services also runs pre-sessional programmes during the summer for students whose English language level is at or slightly below the required standard for university entry. A further programme of free English classes is provided for full-time fee-paying overseas students. In 2007-08, additional help is being provided for international students in the Faculty of Business, Economics and Law, and tutors are working alongside staff in these subject areas to give subject-specific help to those

students who may be experiencing language problems. The review team was told that the need for this provision had been identified by staff at the relevant school in the specific context of subject-related language and that the school was now seeking to ensure that additional language support was provided in a systematic and comprehensive manner. The team was also told that the University wishes to monitor the growth of this provision and to disseminate good practice arising from this example to other schools.

144 The Library and Information Services and the Careers Service were combined in the summer of 2006. This fusion has enabled the University to bring together careers and employability frameworks within a personal development profile flagged as Learning and Professional Development. In its self-evaluation document, the University explained that it has instituted a customised personal learning environment based on open-source software that provides a range of interactive tools supporting collaboration and personalised learning. This technology has been implemented to deliver the University's personal development planning policy. The system gives students a platform to record and reflect on their learning and skills development, to build and create an e-portfolio. The onus for using this system rests with students, with assistance and guidance from academic and administrative staff. Following a trial of the system, the University is seeking to engage the student body to improve its overall usage. The review team noted that, at the school level, programme handbooks did not consistently include details about Learning and Professional Development. Students met by the team appreciated the power of the facility and had made varying use of it.

145 The review team saw evidence that professional bodies, as part of accreditation procedures, viewed such developments as an example of good practice. It concurred with the view of the University that 'the integration of Careers with Library and Information Services, including its relocation to the campus Library is proving to be extremely beneficial in supporting students' employability and mobility'. It also considered that the University had developed a potentially effective profiling system and noted the University's intention to refine these developments using its normal monitoring processes.

146 The Student Services Directorate is responsible for the production and distribution of information for new students. Pre-enrolment information is sent to students' homes during August with personalised enrolment instructions from the Student Records Unit. The information pack includes: travel advice, the Student Support Services Handbook, Swansea Medical Information, Essential Freshers' Guide (produced in partnership with the Students' Union), and a tuition fee guidance booklet. Welcome packs are produced and provided to all new students. The packs include a variety of helpful inserts, some in bilingual format, as well as the relevant undergraduate or postgraduate academic handbook. Beyond the provision of paper information, the University asserted in its self-evaluation document that it takes a personal approach to welcoming new students and their parents to the University. During the arrival weekend an open invitation is given to all new students and their parents to attend a welcome event. Students met by the review team confirmed that induction events organised centrally by the University had been purposeful and successful. A survey of new students undertaken in 2006-07 gave a 76 per cent satisfaction rating for information and arrival arrangements.

147 Overall, the review team concluded that the University has adopted a strategic approach to the development of its structures to providing personal support and guidance to students and continues to enhance its services.

Collaborative provision

148 The extent of the University's collaborative provision is small as indicated earlier in the report. The Collaborative Provision Subcommittee, which reports to the Learning and Teaching Committee, is responsible for managing the University's academic collaborative activities. Although the University has decided not to engage in major franchising or validation activities, it has expanded its exchange agreements for students and its facilitation agreements. It has exchange agreements with 79 institutions under the Erasmus Lifelong Learning programme, and 30 facilitation agreements with institutions in the UK and overseas. The University also took the decision to develop joint degrees with European universities through the Erasmus Mundus programme, and to date, it has successfully collaborated with two such programmes.

149 The Collaborative Provision Subcommittee, supported by the Academic Registry, identified the need to play a more proactive managerial role across the full range of its collaborative activities, and to develop an infrastructure for managing and recording various contracts. To fulfil this, it has created and maintained a central register of all current contracts and memoranda of agreement. It has similarly standardised the format and terms of conditions of all such memoranda. The review team confirmed the currency of the collaborative provision register and that standardised memoranda of agreement signed by the Vice-Chancellor existed for collaborative partnerships.

150 The University has clear procedures for the approval of new collaborative arrangements. Initial discussions take place between the school and the potential partner in order to explore the detail of any new collaborative proposal. The school learning and teaching committee must approve any proposals before further action is taken. The proposal is then forwarded to the Collaborative Provision Subcommittee where a specialist panel considers and approves the programme proposal. The relevant faculty committee is expected to carry out a detailed academic scrutiny of the collaborative programme proposal. The Collaborative Provision Subcommittee establishes a specialist panel of assessors to review the proposal, including a visit to the partner, and receives a report from the assessors with their recommendations. The Collaborative Provision Subcommittee then decides whether to approve the collaborative proposal and forward any approval to the Learning and Teaching Committee and to Senate. The memorandum of agreement has to be signed by all parties.

151 The University's scrutiny of proposals for Erasmus Mundus schemes involves two stages, namely an initial scrutiny by two pro vice-chancellors of an outline proposal followed by a detailed assessment of the programme, including a visit to the relevant institutions. The Collaborative Provision Subcommittee makes the recommendation to the Learning and Teaching Committee on whether the programme should be approved. Documentation seen by the review team for this process was not always consistent in the type of supporting materials provided. Exchange and facilitation agreements may be developed within the schools, and the University keeps a central record and oversight of all such agreements, underpinned by a network of coordinators within schools responsible for the management of exchange

agreements. The Collaborative Provision Subcommittee monitors all such agreements to ensure that quality is maintained and to achieve a more strategic approach to mobility. Facilitation agreements for entry at level 1 are scrutinised by the Admissions Committee, while at level 2, school learning and teaching committees perform a similar task before recommendations are made to the Collaborative Provision Subcommittee on whether to approve the agreement.

152 Monitoring and review of collaborative provision are largely based on the University's quality assurance processes for campus-taught programmes. For franchised programmes, a joint board of studies is established and meets annually to monitor the progress of the programme. As a standing item on each agenda, the Collaborative Provision Subcommittee reviews the activities of the main collaborative agreements and also conducts quinquennial reviews. The review team confirmed that such arrangements operated as described by the University, and that they were effective in ensuring that the University maintained supervision of its collaborative provision and operated in accordance with the *Code of practice, Section 2*. The Collaborative Provision Subcommittee has a wide remit encompassing issues concerning the University's international and quality enhancement agendas, as well as the management and oversight of its collaborative arrangements. It is helped in this dual role by the improved flow of management information data that it receives. Overall, the team found that the management of collaborative provision was sound and well linked to the University's international agenda. The effectiveness of the operations of the Collaborative Provision Subcommittee and associated mechanisms is such that the enhancement of international student mobility is a feature of good practice.

Section 3: The review investigations – published information

The students' experience of published information and other information available to them

153 In its self-evaluation document, the University stated that its methods for assuring the quality of published information are fit for purpose, with authority delegated to those closest to the source of information. Decisions about information published by the University are made either centrally or by individual schools. The University expressed confidence that its procedures ensure that all published information produced centrally is accurate and appropriate. The review team was also informed that individual schools have developed their own systems to check that information produced at school level is accurate, and that feedback from students shows that they have a high level of satisfaction with the information provided to them by the University centrally and by the schools.

154 The University's Marketing Department is responsible for the design, production and distribution of a range of corporate publications, including the prospectuses. Publications produced by the Marketing Department are subject to internal quality control, and content is reviewed to ensure consistency across corporate publications. The Marketing Department requires school admissions tutors to submit content for prospectuses. A proof is provided to the commissioning school for checking and amending, and a final proof is provided for sign-off. Final responsibility therefore rests with the commissioning school to ensure the accuracy of the content.

155 In accordance with the University's current Welsh Language Scheme, due for review in 2008, documentation is published selectively bilingually in Welsh and English.

This documentation includes a short Welsh language prospectus that highlights those courses available through the medium of Welsh, together with a Welsh version of the Student Support Services Handbook. As part of its review, the University is continuing to consider the extent to which its current policy reasonably meets the needs of both internal and external stakeholders concerning what documentation is available in both languages. Responsibility for the accuracy of translation of these publications rests with the Academic Registry's Welsh Language Office.

156 Students met by the review team expressed satisfaction that the information made available to them within prospectuses was suitable, and fairly represented the University's provision. The team was also able to verify that corporate documents available in Welsh were written in a style of language that was both accurate and accessible.

157 Students receive information about the University's regulations and procedures in the Academic Handbook for Undergraduate Students, Academic Handbook for Postgraduate Taught Awards and the Research Student Handbook. The accuracy and completeness of these handbooks are the responsibility of the Academic Registrar, in conjunction with the Academic Regulations Committee. Changes in regulations recommended by the Academic Regulations Committee and approved by Senate are incorporated into the appropriate handbook for the following academic year, and the Academic Registrar is charged with the responsibility of ensuring their accuracy.

158 In its self-evaluation document, the University stated that student feedback given through the annual Omnibus Survey has consistently recorded a high degree of satisfaction with information provided to students by schools regarding programmes, modules and regulations, and reveals a high degree of understanding among students regarding their degree regulations and associated information.

159 The student written submission included a comprehensive list of information made available to students but made no judgement regarding its accuracy, completeness and reliability. However, students met by the review team confirmed that they understood the regulatory system, and that the information that they had received had been useful and comprehensive. The student written submission also referred to comments by some students about the process of module selection on entry to the University. These comments concerned the difficulty of fully understanding the choices that needed to be made, exacerbated by some inaccuracies in the module information made available.

160 In its Welsh Language Scheme of 2004, the University states its commitment to develop its website by presenting information that is of general interest to the public in both English and Welsh, and by ensuring that all corporate pages are available in both languages. At the time of the review, a restricted number of pages in Welsh were available on the University's website. Some of this information was out of date, and the website indicated that a comprehensive Welsh-language website was being developed. The University informed the review team that it was aware that its Welsh-medium website did not meet the requirements laid out in its own Welsh Language Scheme, and that imminent progress was expected to redress the situation. The team established that the issue had been raised regularly at meetings of the Use of Welsh Committee, but it was not persuaded that the University had yet identified a clear mechanism and associated resources to fulfil its statutory obligation. It therefore advises the University to review its Welsh language website, in order to ensure the sufficiency, accuracy and currency of the information therein.

161 The University stated that it had developed a Student Intranet 'to enhance administrative services, to provide software supporting functions within schools, such as assessment, and address data quality, data protection and freedom of information issues. Students can enrol online, pre-record module selection, track their module selection, review results and progress, access a financial statement and check personal details. While students are encouraged to check their student profile online, information is also checked by school staff and by the Student Records Office. This verification process ensures accurate information is available for University management and planning, academic assessment, administrative functions and for student returns to HEFCW, HESA and other agencies'. The review team confirmed the usefulness of this development, and noted that many formal documents are available for students on the intranet. The University told the team that the request sheet for students registering to submit assessments in Welsh would be made available on the intranet for the 2008-09 session.

162 Students seen by the review team varied in their use of the intranet and their understanding of its scope. However, they welcomed the development and appreciated, for example, its potential to address concerns regarding the information provided for module selection.

163 In its self-evaluation document the University concluded that it had strong confidence in the quality assurance procedures that ensure the accuracy of the statistical information that it publishes. It adds that this confidence and the rigorous procedures also extend to the statistical data provided by the Administrative Computing Unit for internal monitoring of standards and enhance quality.

164 Information seen by the review team and available to students, including a sample of programme handbooks and web-based information, varied in its level of detail, but documents were generally informative and accurate on matters of course content and assessment. The team also found that students' experience of published and internal information was generally positive. The system developed by the University combines central oversight with delegated authority. In general, the team found that this balance was well understood and worked effectively.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

165 Before the start of each academic year, the Academic Registry provides schools with a template for their handbooks for undergraduate students and a modified template for their handbook for taught postgraduate students. The purpose of the template is to promote a consistent approach across schools, in order that students receive a standard basis of core information regarding matters such as school structure, assessment and examinations, student support and programme content. In addition, schools are expected to adapt the template to include additional programme-related information for students. As described elsewhere in this report, schools are responsible for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of information provided to students.

166 Programme specifications are held on a secure online internal database, with named staff being permitted to make amendments. The University's aim in its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is to make this internal database available for current and future students. This aim builds on the University's current policy of providing graduating students with Diploma Supplements that include the learning

outcomes set out in programme specifications. The review team was informed that the University's intention is to link this site with marketing material and the national Unistats website. The team viewed the system and concluded that the University's use of databases in this area was already sufficiently advanced that it represented a feature of good practice.

167 Procedures for admission, appeals and written complaints are readily available to students within the handbooks. For those students wishing to submit their assessments in Welsh, the procedure is set out in the relevant academic handbook and repeated in the template for programme handbooks (albeit that at the time of the review the Academic Handbook for Undergraduate Students for 2007-08 needed revision to ensure consistency with the template). However, the review team found that information for such students was not clear. In particular, it concurred with the recommendation of an internal thematic review in 2006 that it would be advisable for the University to adopt a more coordinated approach to communicating with students about their rights to be assessed in Welsh. The team noted the University's recent stated intention to address the recommendation.

168 The University's corporate website was relaunched with a new style, content management system and structure in 2006. In its self-evaluation document, the University expressed the view that a consistent use of style and format has helped the University to move away from the more fragmented approach that characterised the old website, and that the University's Web Office is now in a better position to monitor the website's nature and accuracy. The self-evaluation document reported that over 300 staff have been trained to input content into the content management system, and responsibility for the accuracy of their submissions remains with individual schools. The web editor checks content for consistency with other corporate web pages before publishing on the website. In the prospectuses, publicity material and student handbooks seen by the review team and available in both English and Welsh standards of expression and presentation in the two languages are similar.

169 Several schools have their own web development teams or groups, while maintaining links with the central Web Office. In its self-evaluation document, the University noted that a considerable amount of the Web Office team's time is devoted to liaising with schools to ensure that statistics, programme details and other information published on the University site are accurate and current.

170 External examiners' reports, summaries, published internal documents and student feedback summaries seen by the review team were accurate and fairly reflected the full reports. The Administrative Computing Unit, which includes the Student Record Office, is responsible for preparing and submitting student data to HESA in annual returns. The data are scrutinised by a range of internal stakeholders. For example, module selections and progression codes are checked by school and Academic Registry staff. Administrative Computing Unit procedures seek to ensure that data, script and information products are assessed for accuracy. The quality systems are subject to internal review by the University's Joint Internal Audit Unit and to external review by auditors appointed by HEFCW.

171 The review team found that, the University's Welsh language website apart, the University's published and internally distributed information in its prospectuses, website, academic handbooks, support service handbooks and programme handbooks is generally consistent, accurate and detailed.

Findings

172 An institutional review of Swansea University (the University) was undertaken during the week 12 to 16 May 2008. The purpose of the review was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for the standards of its awards. This section of the report summarises the findings of the review. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged, and recommendations to the University for enhancing current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

173 The University operates a three-tier system for the management of academic quality and standards. At the first, institutional, level, Senate has overall responsibility. The Learning and Teaching Committee and the Academic Regulations Committee, both chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic), are the senior policy-making bodies responsible for University-wide procedures. The University's main quality assurance mechanisms are documented in the Teaching Quality Manual. The second tier of the quality assurance system constitutes the faculties, including the Postgraduate Research Faculty, which are responsible for monitoring the operation of their constituent schools. The dean of the faculty plays a key role in linking the first and second tiers. At the third tier are schools, which deliver the maintenance of quality and standards through, for instance, the annual monitoring of provision, nominations for external examiners, and the development of new programmes. The review team saw that many of the University's procedures made good use of the three tiers, and the team learnt that the cross-membership of committees maintained the flow of information between each of them. The team concluded that the University's academic framework was sound in method and effective in operation.

174 The review team followed a thematic trail to examine a separate review and audit for the School of Law and a combined review and audit for the School of Arts. The team found that the University permitted the chair of the scrutiny panel to review provision from the chair's own faculty, and allowed University membership of a scrutiny panel to be entirely from that faculty. The team recommends that it is desirable for the University to review the membership and chairing of panels for periodic review, in order to ensure the participation of a sufficiently wide range of University staff external to the faculty. The University's practices of inviting comment on programmes from advisers entirely external to the University are well maintained and effective.

175 The review team noted the variability in the construction of action plans at programme level and how the outcome of a periodic review might not contribute fully to the school action plan. The team recommends that it is advisable for the University to review the manner in which action plans arising from annual monitoring and periodic review are drawn up and monitored in order to ensure that they are followed through in a transparent and coherent manner. The team recognised that the University's procedures for annual monitoring and periodic review were new and therefore still being refined, and concluded in that, in general, they were well documented and effective.

176 The University has undergone reviews by external bodies since the continuation audit by QAA in 1999. There have been three QAA reviews at subject level, in each case with a judgement of confidence. The University successfully applied for degree awarding powers over the period 2002-04. A QAA Review of postgraduate research degree programmes, published in 2006, gave the University a positive judgement. Some University programmes are accredited by professional bodies, and the review team saw that professional, statutory and regulatory body reports were carefully considered at school level, and that the Learning and Teaching Committee made good use of faculty summaries. The team found that the University's procedures for responding to external reviews operated well.

177 Students are involved in committees at all levels of the University, from school committees to Senate and other institutional committees. Relations between the Students' Union and the University are strong, with monthly meetings between sabbatical officers and senior managers described as very effective by all those involved. Training is available for courses representatives and for sabbatical officers. Students also play a part in a range of quality assurance processes, including periodic programme review and working groups. The student written submission stressed that the student voice was listened to, and that students contributed significantly to University policy and practice. The review team was able to confirm this.

178 The University has a small amount of distributed and distance learning. Such courses mainly operate from within the Department of Adult and Continuing Education in the Faculty of Health and Human Sciences. Quality assurance processes that apply to other programmes also apply to this provision. The extent of the University's collaborative provision is also small, although it has a significant number of exchange and facilitation (progression) agreements, and has taken the decision to develop joint degrees with other European universities through the Erasmus Mundus scheme of the European Union. The Collaborative Provision Subcommittee, supported by the Academic Registry, has oversight of collaborative provision and there is a clear procedure at school, faculty and university level for the approval of new arrangements. The monitoring and review of collaborative provision is largely based on existing quality assurance processes. The team considers the intent and practice of the University's commitment to widening international student mobility, as part of its engagement with the Bologna Process, to be a feature of good practice. The team found that the University's management of collaborative provision was sound, and was well linked to its international agenda.

179 Overall, the team was able to confirm that the University's procedures for assuring the quality of programmes were effective.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

180 New programmes are introduced by schools, considered by faculties, and validated by a panel established by the Academic Regulations Committee. As part of programme approval, the University has introduced an online method of recording information that generates programme specifications and module descriptions, can be widely viewed by staff, assists module choices by students and contributes to the diploma supplement. The review team considered the development of this database to be a feature of good practice. The team found, via a thematic trail, how the University had discontinued programmes in chemistry in a way that protected the

interests of those students still studying on them.

181 In 2006-07, the University introduced a new system for monitoring and reviewing programmes. Annual monitoring is carried out by schools, with boards of study drawing up a yearly report on each programme. A school synopsis is compiled for consideration by the faculty, which in turn prepares a report for the Learning and Teaching Committee. All programmes are reviewed every five years: following a periodic review report by the school, the programme or group of programmes is considered by a panel; an action plan arising from the review is monitored by the Learning and Teaching Committee, which also addresses institutional issues. The University operates a system of academic audits of schools, which may be carried out in conjunction with periodic review.

182 The University's policies on assessment are generally well documented. Students receive University handbooks on the regulations and school handbooks, which set out the assessment methods and learning outcomes for modules and the requirements for levels of performance. The review team heard from students that they were clear about how they would be assessed. The University carries out an annual review of assessment that is reported to the Academic Regulations Committee.

183 A Welsh Language Scheme, which the University operates, entitles students to be assessed in Welsh. In 2006, the University reviewed its arrangements for this scheme, and concluded that they were adequate. However, the review team noted that the scheme was being implemented somewhat cautiously and recommends that it is advisable for the University to review information about assessment in the medium of Welsh. Student progression and the award of qualifications operate at two levels. Schools hold examination boards that determine marks. Faculties then hold progression and award board meetings that make the final decisions. The team found that University statements about the ratification of marks were ambiguous, but heard from staff that the system was clear in practice. The team had difficulty in determining by whom some documents were written and when they were issued. The team recommends that it is desirable for the University to review key quality and standards documents to ensure transparency to users in respect of consistency of terminology, dates of issue, and provenance.

184 The approval of all programmes and any major amendments involves an external specialist who conducts an independent academic appraisal to determine that the standard of the award is appropriate. The University's procedures for periodic review likewise include an external assessor to ensure that the programme remains consistent with external standards. The review team found that this was normally the case in practice, but that in a specific example where all the programmes in one school had been reviewed at the same time, there had not been an assessor sufficiently knowledgeable to cover one of the disciplines. The self-evaluation document emphasised how much the University valued the contribution of external peers to quality assurances processes, and the team concluded that, in general, the University had sufficiently strong externality in programme approval and periodic review. However, the team recommends that it is advisable that where a broad range of subject areas is brought together in a single periodic review, the University draws upon a sufficient range of external expertise for the review panel to ensure that all discipline areas are adequately covered.

185 The University has clear procedures for the appointment of external examiners and the review team confirmed the University's view that they are effective. External

examiners play a key role in approving assessments, endorsing marks and assessment decisions, and in commenting on academic standards and the curricula. External examiners' reports are considered by schools, and a synopsis, which identifies institutional matters and highlights good practice, is prepared by the faculty for the Learning and Teaching Committee. The team learnt that issues raised by external examiners were systematically taken into account as part of an annual review of assessment by the Academic Regulations Committee, and that the University had recently carried out a thematic review of external examining. The team formed the view that the manner in which the University considered external examiners' reports at institutional level constituted a feature of good practice.

186 Statistical information is used extensively by the University for the purposes of the annual monitoring and the periodic review of programmes. The University has adopted the Assessment Reports on the Quality of University Examinations, a software tool that enables the performance of individual students, cohorts and larger groupings to be interrogated and commented upon. The tool has facilitated the effective use of data at all levels of the institution. The review team saw how it aided the moderation of marks by a school. The Learning and Teaching Committee uses descriptive statistics and more detailed statistical tools for the consideration of degree classification trends. The use of statistical information had been the subject of a recent thematic review by the University. The team was also give access to another tool that enables staff to track the progress of research students and provide a range of useful data. The team heard how the Administrative Computing Unit was able to support the work of the committees, and that staff considered the central data to be reliable and comprehensive. Overall, the team was of the view that the widespread use of management information to inform discussion at all levels, and the adoption of the assessment reports on the Quality of University Examinations and other data analysis tools, constitute a feature of good practice. The team also formed the opinion that the online process accessible to all staff for the tracking of postgraduate research students constituted a further feature of good practice.

187 The University recently reviewed its complaints and appeals procedure. This resulted in the addition of a final stage, whereby students may submit a final case to the Academic Registrar. Regulations for complaints and appeals are easily accessible on the University's web pages, and the Students' Union also provides advice and support. The students endorsed the view expressed in the self-evaluation document that the handling of complaints and appeals by the University was a strength of its provision. Information on complaints and appeals is available bilingually, and the University plans to reinforce this by making the right to a bilingual assessment appeal hearing explicit in its regulations for 2008-09. Overall, the team concluded that the University's processes for dealing with complaints and appeals were rigorous, explicit and transparent.

188 The team were able to confirm the effectiveness of the University's approach to the management of academic standards.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

189 The University has a clear learning, teaching and assessment strategy that provides the basis for enhancement of the student experience. In response to this strategy, HEFCW funding has been obtained which has enabled the University to make significant advances in its resources for supporting learning.

190 The University is responsive to the views of its students. It has a range of formal and informal mechanisms for ensuring that those views are heard, and that action is taken as necessary to address any issues raised. These mechanisms include student representation on committees at all levels of the University, regular meetings between officers of the Students' Union and the University's senior management team, and surveys, both internal and external. In particular, the University has been vigorous in responding to the results of the National Student Survey. In meetings during the review, students endorsed the view expressed in the student written submission that the University is responsive to their opinions; they were able to cite evidence to indicate that their feedback contributes to the shaping of their learning experience.

191 The self-evaluation document makes it clear that the University's approach to the provision of academic staffing is determined by its position as a research-focused institution. This has a clear impact on teaching, and students were well aware, and appreciative, of the extent to which their learning was informed by current research.

192 Processes for the induction and mentoring of newly appointed staff were clear, and evidence from staff suggested that they were well understood and followed by individual schools, although there were some areas of variability between schools, for example in the amount of relief from teaching offered to probationary staff. Likewise, appraisal and review processes were set out in a transparent manner, and included opportunities for discussion of feedback from students on the learning experience provided by lecturers. A route to senior lectureship now exists in which teaching excellence is the primary component; however, this is not the case for professorships, where the criteria remain research-based. In addition, Distinguished Teaching Awards have been created in order to reward outstanding excellence in teaching.

193 The University has a well-developed policy for staff development, combining central provision of generic courses with funding to support training (sometimes external to the University) to meet individual needs. The policy is delivered by the Staff Development Unit, and is effectively monitored by the Human Resources Policy Committee. In addition to providing formal training, the Staff Development Unit also facilitates a variety of less formal events at which good practice in learning and teaching can be shared.

194 An integrated Library and Information Services department delivers both library services and information technology support for learning across the university. Library provision has recently been extensively refurbished, and opening hours have been significantly extended, including an experimental period of 24-hour opening during examination periods. Library staff are active in seeking feedback from users, and both the student written submission and comments from students during the review visit confirmed a high level of satisfaction with the service provided. This confirmed the view expressed in the self-evaluation document, that the Library and Information Service is 'responsive to user needs'.

195 The University's approach to e-learning is driven by the need to provide learners with support, rather than being technology-led, and is described as 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down'. In practice, this means that support is provided to individual members of staff and departments to engage in development of their e-learning resources. The principal tool for this is the virtual learning environment, and the team learned that there are over 1,600 virtual learning environment modules now in use across the University, although intensity of usage varies between different subject

areas. The team recognises the progress that has been made, and notes the University's intention to move in due course to a more proactive e-learning strategy.

196 Academic guidance is provided both by written documentation such as programme handbooks, and via personal contact with academic staff. The provision of programme handbooks is the responsibility of individual schools, and there is some variation in the level of information provided. The University has, however, developed a template for handbooks that defines minimum content, and intends to continue monitoring, to ensure that all students are provided with comparable information. Student comments to the review team indicated that the information provided was generally regarded as being accurate and comprehensive.

197 The University operates a personal tutoring system for all undergraduate and taught postgraduate students. However, information from both staff and students indicated that personal tutors have a limited role to play in the provision of academic guidance, and that students are encouraged to regard their course tutors as the main source of information about the academic aspects of their experience. Students understood this to be the case, and found the system to operate effectively. The view was expressed in the student written submission, and confirmed by student comment during the review visit, that the overall level of academic support and guidance provided was good and fully met the needs of students.

198 Personal support to students is provided primarily by the personal tutor system. Regular training events for personal tutors are available, and the University has also developed a comprehensive personal tutors' handbook. Students whom the review team met during the visit showed a high level of awareness of the personal tutoring system, and were clear as to the differing areas of responsibility of personal and academic tutors.

199 In addition, a range of more specialised support services is available, under the umbrella of Student Support Services. This consolidated department incorporates the Student Services Directorate, Student Counselling, the Money Advice and Support Office, Residential Services, English Language Training Services, the Disability Office, and the International Student Advisory Service. Both the University and students in their student written submission indicate that the incorporation of these services under a single management has improved both visibility and delivery. The review team was able to confirm this view, in particular, concluding that a comprehensive system of support for disabled students is in place.

200 The Careers Service has been integrated within Library and Information Services since 2006, in order to bring together careers and employability frameworks within a single unit, and to provide a platform for the delivery of personal development planning. Comments from professional bodies during accreditation visits indicate that such developments are regarded as examples of good practice.

201 In consideration of the information contained in the preceding paragraphs, the review team formed the view that the procedures adopted by the University for supporting learning were both comprehensive and effective. These procedures had a major role to play in ensuring that learners had the necessary opportunities to achieve the standards expected of them.

The use made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure

202 The University makes use of the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA, in a variety of ways. All sections of the *Code of practice* were thoroughly considered when they were first issued, to ensure that the University's regulations and procedures were compatible with them. Revisions to the *Code* have been investigated by the University, in some cases by means of a thematic review, although the review team found that sometimes the institution was slow to do so. The use of subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ is a part of the University's procedures. The team saw that the University operated a well-designed system for the communication and maintenance of programme specifications. The team concluded that the University had paid due attention to all elements of the Academic Infrastructure. The University takes note of the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* and is mindful of the provisions of the Bologna Process.

The utility of the self-evaluation document as an illustration of the institution's capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and limitations, and to act on these to enhance quality and standards

203 The review team found the self-evaluation document to be clear, accurate and comprehensive; it provided a sound basis for the review. The document was well structured and the version provided on CD-ROM helpfully contained automatic links to the cited evidence base. The self-evaluation document was a solidly analytical document, and helped to demonstrate the University's capacity to reflect on its own strengths and limitations as a basis for future action.

Commentary on the institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards

204 The University is committed to the monitoring of its quality assurance procedures across its schools. It will further develop aspects of these procedures, such as school academic audits and thematic reviews, which have been useful in allowing staff to reflect on their own practices and for identifying areas for improvement that involve both academic and administrative roles. The University has a continuing commitment to widening its international profile by encouraging student mobility and by selective developments with universities overseas. This builds upon existing strengths in language provision and pastoral and academic support for such activities. The review team formed the opinion that the intent and practice of such developments were sufficiently soundly based to be commended as an instance of good practice.

205 The University is using its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2007-2010 as the driver for improvements in the student learning experience. These are to be achieved by greater emphasis in supporting the transition to the world of work and in developing e-learning. The University acknowledges that there is scope for improvement in the ways in which it disseminates good practice across the institution.

206 The review team concluded that the University has effective processes for the enhancement of its academic programmes, that the processes are regularly evaluated with the intention of developing them, and that emphasis is being placed on ensuring that all staff are aware of the opportunities for enhancement of the student learning experience.

Reliability of information

207 The University's published information is generally accurate and comprehensive. In accordance with the University's current Welsh Language Scheme some documentation is published bilingually in Welsh and English. Those documents that are currently made available in Welsh are also accurate. However information in Welsh on the University's website is incomplete and lacks currency. It falls short of the expectations laid out in the University's own Welsh Language Scheme.

Features of good practice

208 The following features of good practice were noted:

- the intent and practice of the University's commitment to widening international student mobility as part of its engagement with the Bologna Process (paragraphs 35, 152)

- the development of an online database for the specification and approval of information on programmes and modules (paragraphs 39, 66, 166)

- the widespread use of management information to inform discussion at all levels, together with the adoption of the Assessment Reports on the Quality of University Examinations and other data analysis tools (paragraphs 43, 94 to 96)

- the University's consideration of external examiner reports at institutional level (paragraph 62)

- the online process accessible to all staff for the tracking of postgraduate research students (paragraphs 92, 96, 133).

Recommendations for action

209 Recommendations for action that the review team considers it advisable for the University to address are as follows:

- to draw upon sufficient range of external expertise for the review panel to ensure that all discipline areas are adequately covered where a broad range of subject areas is brought together in a single periodic review (paragraph 50, 51, 52)

- to review the manner in which action plans arising from annual monitoring and periodic review are drawn up and monitored, in order to ensure that these plans are followed through in a transparent and coherent manner (paragraphs 54, 55)

- to review its Welsh language website and other information about the use of Welsh in order to ensure the sufficiency, accuracy and currency of the information therein (paragraphs 57, 160, 167).

210 Recommendations for action that the review team considers it desirable for the University to address are as follows:

- to review the membership and chairing of panels for periodic review, in order to ensure the participation of a sufficiently wide range of University staff external to the faculty (paragraphs 49, 52)

- to review key quality and standards documents, in order to ensure transparency to users in respect of consistency of terminology, dates of issue, and provenance (paragraphs 58, 60).

Appendix

Swansea University's response to the institutional review report

The University warmly welcomes the judgement that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

We particularly welcome the numerous features of good practice highlighted in the report and we are already engaged in drawing up plans in response to the recommendations identified.

We found the institutional review to be robust and searching, but also fair, open and constructive.