Cardiff University

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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Introduction

A team of reviewers from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Cardiff University (the University) from 28 April to 2 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 the University 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 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 Cardiff 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 systematic formulation and implementation of the University's enhancement strategies

- the contribution of staff research activity to the quality of teaching and to the quality of student learning opportunities generally

- the integration of programme development with strategic and resource planning

- the arrangements established by the University to secure student involvement in quality assurance processes and institution-level committees

- the effective partnership between the University and the Students' Union to improve the quality of the student learning experience

- the systematic approach to staff support and professional development.

Recommendations for action

The review team advises the institution to:

- ensure that cycles of review activity, both for Periodic Review and Revalidation, and for Quality Progress Review, take place within the timeframes specified in University procedures.

The team considered it desirable for the institution to:

- consider the need for accountability to the Senate of school-level committees, in the context of the University's framework for the management of academic quality and standards

- review the policies and procedures for collaborative provision to ensure that the particular risks associated with this area of activity are identified and appropriately managed.

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 at help to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the review suggest that the University makes full and effective use of external reference points, including the Academic Infrastructure, the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* and the Welsh Language Board. The University also promotes implementation of the higher education policies of the Welsh Assembly.

Main Report

Section 1: Introduction – Cardiff University

1   An institutional review of Cardiff University (the University) was undertaken from 28 April to 2 May, 2008. The purpose of the review was to provide public information on the quality of the University 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 review, undertaken by the QAA at the request of Universities UK and the Standing Conference of Principals. 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 procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of academic awards from Cardiff University; 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 provision and collaborative arrangements leading to Cardiff University awards.

The institution and its mission

4   The University was established in 2004-05 following the merger of the University of Wales, Cardiff and the University of Wales College of Medicine (UWCM). The University retraces its origins to the establishment in 1883 of the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire, the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology, which was granted a Charter in 1967, and the formation of the Welsh National School of Medicine in 1931. The University is the largest higher education institution in Wales and it caters for approximately a quarter of the higher education student population in Wales. The University has some 24,000 students of whom approximately 17,500 are undergraduates, 5,000 are enrolled on taught postgraduate programmes, and 1,400 are registered for research degrees.

5   The University operates on two main sites. The clinical disciplines are mainly delivered at the University Hospital site (the Heath Campus), with the rest of the University's provision being based in central Cardiff (the Cathays Campus). There are 28 academic schools, spanning a wide range of disciplines, and five administrative directorates. A large number of the University's programmes are accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

6   Although the University of Wales, Cardiff, had been granted degree-awarding powers for taught and research degrees in 1996, it held these powers in abeyance. With the award of university status and title in 2005, the University ceased to be a member of the federal University of Wales. Cardiff University continues to offer awards

of the University of Wales to all students who entered degree programmes prior to September 2005, and to new undergraduate students of medicine, dentistry, nursing and healthcare studies who commenced their studies between September 2005 and 2007. Medical and dental students continue to be registered for University of Wales degrees because of the current all-Wales nature of the provision. This arrangement is supported by a service level agreement between the Cardiff University and the University of Wales. The self-evaluation document emphasised that, before and since its secession in 2004 from the Federal University, 'Cardiff University has regarded itself as wholly and solely responsible for the quality and standards of its provision and for protecting the standards of its awards'.

Mission statement

7   The University's vision is to be a world-leading university and its mission is to 'pursue research, learning and teaching of international distinction and impact'. The current Strategic Plan states that 'all of the University's activities are directed to achieving the highest international standards in research, learning and teaching, pursued in a rich and varied research-led environment where all staff and students can achieve their full potential to the benefit of the wider community and society as a whole'.

Collaborative provision

8   The self-evaluation document stated that, prior to merger, the University had no collaborative provision apart from a number of articulation arrangements. Following merger, several existing UWCM arrangements were transferred to the new institution. These include programmes in health and sports medicine and occupational therapy that are offered in collaboration with higher education partners within Wales and three programmes offered with overseas partners. The self-evaluation document also noted an arrangement with Swansea University through which graduate students entering a four-year medical course take the final two years of the programme within Cardiff University.

9   The information provided subsequently by the University included details of other collaborative provision, including a dual award arrangement with the Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Bordeaux) which was approved in 2002. Nevertheless, the University's collaborative provision is not extensive and for this reason it was agreed that it should fall within the scope of the current review.

Background information

10   The information available for this review included:

- information published on the University's website, generally, and on a dedicated Quickplace site

- the previous quality audit report on the Continuation audit of the University of Wales College of Medicine, completed in July 1999, and that of Cardiff University in October 2000

- reports on QAA subject engagements in architecture, computing and occupational therapy (not published)

- the report on the QAA special review of research degrees, 2006 (not published)

- the University's self-evaluation document for the institutional review

- the student written submission

- supporting documentation linked to the self-evaluation document.

11   The review team also had access to a range of the University's internal documents, including documents relating to the thematic trails selected by the team. The team is grateful to the University for the access it was given to this information.

The review process

12   QAA conducted a preliminary visit to the institution on 22 August 2007 to discuss operational aspects of the review. QAA received the self-evaluation document on 31 January 2008.

13   The review team visited the University from 11 to 13 March 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 or other documentation provided for the team. During this briefing visit the team signalled a number of themes for the review visit, and developed a programme of meetings which was agreed with the University.

14   The review visit took place from 28 April to 2 May 2008 and involved further meetings with staff and students of the University. The review team comprised Professor P Hodson, Professor P Manning, Professor C Raban, Dr C Vielba, and Ms H Placito, review secretary. The review was coordinated for QAA by Ms J Holt and Professor C Clare, Assistant Directors, Reviews Group.

Developments since the previous academic quality review

15   The Continuation audit of the University of Wales College of Medicine was completed in July 1999, and that of Cardiff University in October 2000. The documentation supplied by the University for the present review included detailed and comprehensive analyses of the actions taken in response to both reports.

16   The operation of examination boards is kept under annual review and there has been increased involvement by Registry officers in their meetings and in the provision of support for Chairs. The University's Assessment Strategy identifies a number of actions to ensure the reliability and equity of the arrangements for the classification of student awards, and the Awards and Progress Committee is responsible for conferring degrees and other qualifications and for receiving compliance reports from examining boards on their conduct of business. The review team concluded that the University had addressed effectively the issues raised by the 2000 Continuation audit regarding the operation of examination boards and the parity of awards.

17   Student performance data is now routinely evaluated at programme level through the University's Annual Programme Review and Evaluation procedure. An institutional overview is maintained by the Awards and Progress Committee and by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. There are also projects underway to

improve the functionality of the system and increase the use of statistical data in the management of quality and standards both centrally and locally within the institution.

18   The procedure for the Annual Review of Schemes has been re-designated as Annual Programme Review and Evaluation of Taught Programmes, and in 2000-01 the University introduced a parallel procedure for the review of postgraduate activity. The effectiveness of these procedures is considered on an annual basis by the relevant University committees, and a variety of means is employed to disseminate their outcomes. The review team formed the view that the designed procedures for annual monitoring were robust and conducive to assuring standards.

19   The arrangements for the training of research students, prior to their involvement in teaching, are governed by a University Code of Practice which was approved in 1999 and amended in 2003. Although responsibility for ensuring that postgraduate research students receive a minimum level of training lies with heads of school, courses are provided by the graduate schools and form part of the Research Students' Skills Development Programme. Reports on the effectiveness of this programme are considered by the Graduate Development Committee, the Graduate School Management Groups and the Graduate Centre Steering Group. The report of the QAA Review of research degree programmes (2006-07) identified the integrated approach of the University to training and skills development as a feature of good practice. The review team concluded that the arrangements at both school and institutional level for training research students in this context are effective and appropriate.

20   The self-evaluation document provided a full account of the action that it has taken in response to the recommendation that it continues to promote awareness and understanding of institutional policy on equality of opportunity. There is an Equality and Diversity Policy supported by a number of more specific policies, and ultimate responsibility for their development and implementation lies with the University Council. Council is advised by the Equality and Diversity Committee through the Governance Committee and by the Corporate Compliance Unit.

Section 2: The review investigations – institutional processes

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

21   The University's quality strategy emphasises 'an evaluative approach and encourages enhancement'. The key features of the University's approach to academic quality management include its 'linkages with institutional strategic planning', a 'growing connectivity between the various quality assurance procedures', adaptation to 'the specific needs of the areas under review', the 'embedded nature of student involvement' and a 'move to an increasing concentration on quality enhancement'. The approach is based on the University's academic strategies and it is supported by a portfolio of documentation which forms 'a comprehensive, coherent and yet adaptable quality framework'.

22   Later in the self-evaluation document it is stated that the University's quality strategy 'embodies a partnership between the University, its schools and all staff, in support of (its) students'. A key role is performed by heads of school who are required to 'ensure that the local arrangements for managing the student experience and the measurement of their levels of attainment align at least with the minimum requirements set down by the University'.

23   The University has a 'flat' structure comprising 28 academic schools, each of which is afforded considerable discretion in the handling of its substantial responsibilities for the management of quality and standards. Heads of school are empowered to act within broadly defined parameters and in the context of what was described by staff as a 'high trust' relationship between schools and the University. The responsibilities assigned to schools include the design and constitution of their committees, the manner in which student feedback is obtained, and the design, approval and management of student assessment. The School Board is described as the senior committee at school level with responsibility for the allocation of resources, the management of taught programmes of study, recommending internal and external examiners' appointments and for advising the Head of School on major issues of policy.

24   Heads of school are required to establish boards of studies 'to ensure the coordination of all academic and administrative matters associated with taught schemes of study'. Boards of study report to the School Board either directly or through one or more of its subcommittees. Schools are expected to have mechanisms to deal with a range of responsibilities, including learning and teaching, quality assurance, academic standards and student admissions. However, the structure, terms of reference and membership of any committees established to deal with such matters are neither prescribed by the University nor subject to its approval. The content of the School Board minutes available to the team reflected the wide range of responsibilities assigned to these bodies. The review team observed that in some cases, school boards received and noted action that had been taken by staff or other school committees, and that they did not themselves engage in a direct and proactive manner with matters relating to the academic provision for which they are responsible.

25   The Senate is the University's 'primary academic committee' and the Academic Standards and Quality Committee of the Senate has responsibility for 'advising the University on all matters relating to the promotion of academic quality and standards across the full range of its provision for students'. The Senate is also served by an Academic Strategy Committee which is supported, in turn, by the Learning and Teaching, Graduate Development and Research committees. The review team noted that the accountability of school boards to the University as a whole is through the Head of School and the executive structure rather than directly to Senate and its committees. The staff met by the team confirmed that the minutes of school boards are not held centrally.

26   The accountability of schools to the Senate and its committees is secured through the University's quality assurance procedures and by the fact that heads of school are themselves members of Senate. In discharging its responsibilities for

academic quality and standards, the Academic Standards and Quality Committee is reliant on the indirect evidence that is supplied on an annual basis by the review and evaluation procedures for taught programmes and research degrees. Evidence of a more direct kind is obtained from external examiners' reports and from the procedures for Periodic Review and Revalidation, which was designed to operate on a quinquennial cycle, with the Quality Progress Review operating within this cycle. Operationally the self-evaluation document notes this is a five to seven-year cycle, and so the direct evidence provided by the Quality Progress Review on the effectiveness and compliance of schools in fully implementing the procedures of the University are typically operating on a seven-year cycle. The Quality Progress Review procedure performs the particularly important function of ensuring that schools are effective in their continuing discharge of their responsibilities (see also paragraphs 39, 44).

The institution's view of the effectiveness of the framework

27   The University believes that the effectiveness of its framework rests on two principles. The first is that 'all members of staff are expected to take personal responsibility for the quality of their contributions to the provision of students' educational experience'. The self-evaluation document referred on a number of occasions to the 'high calibre' not only of the University's staff but also of its students, and it recognised that 'staff need institutional support to exercise their personal responsibility effectively'. Thus the second principle is that personal responsibility should be exercised 'within a supportive environment'. In this context, the University's various arrangements for staff support and development, and the value it attaches to staff research and scholarly activity, make a vital contribution to the effectiveness of its arrangements. An equally important contribution is made by the documentation supplied by the Academic Policy Section of the Registry and the support, guidance and occasional intervention, provided by Registry staff. The team concluded that the Registry acts as the key agency in facilitating the flow of information between schools and the committees of Senate. This exchange of information and the coherence of the University's academic structures are also facilitated by the informal association of cognate schools for the purpose of managing joint honours programmes, the oversight of groups of schools by each of the five pro vice-chancellors, the graduate schools and the Heads of Schools Group.

28   The review team discussed with staff the various risks that might be incurred by the individual components of the University's framework for managing the quality and standards of its academic provision. These include the considerable delegation of responsibility to, and within, schools irrespective of their size, the absence of any formal accountability of school boards to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and thus to the Senate, and the reliance placed on the annual review and evaluation processes, and on external examiners' reports, to provide a timely assurance that schools are discharging their responsibilities in an appropriate and effective manner. Notwithstanding these potential risks, the team concluded that the framework is consistent with the University's stated intention 'to support the professionalism of staff within a supportive environment'. The combined contributions of the University's arrangements for academic governance, the quality assurance procedures, staff support and guidance and the particular role performed by the

Registry ensure that the University's framework is appropriate and effective. However, the team considers it desirable for the University to consider the need for accountability to the Senate of school-level committees, in the context of the University's framework for the management of academic quality and standards.

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

29   According to the self-evaluation document, the University's 'key institutional priorities' had been, at the time of the previous audit, 'very much related to the developmental opportunities afforded by the progressive articulation of the Academic Infrastructure'. That approach is now 'overlain' by 'a shared commitment to ongoing and progressive enhancement'. The University defines enhancement as 'taking deliberate and systematic steps at all levels in the institution in order to improve the quality of learning opportunities'. The adoption of an 'enhancement-led approach' underpins the development of the University's support for quality assurance procedures and for learning and teaching, and assists it in defining the 'professional values' that inform staff training, development and practice. Evaluative feedback from students and the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation and Quality Progress Review processes was said to generate evidence to inform the University's enhancement priorities, monitor progress at school level, and to identify 'issues of concern' and 'practice worthy of further dissemination'.

30   The University's enhancement priorities extend beyond learning, teaching and assessment to include the virtual and physical aspects of the learning environment. These priorities, and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy that underpins them, were identified in the course of the merger process. The subsequent revision (in 2005-06) of the University's Strategic Plan then provided an opportunity to rework the strategic framework for learning, teaching and assessment. Responsibility for ensuring that all the University's top-level strategy documents remain linked and mutually supportive lies with the Academic Strategy Committee, overseeing the work of its subcommittees for Learning and Teaching, Research and Graduate Study.

31   The University's quality strategy is based on the principle that staff should exercise personal responsibility within a supportive environment (see paragraph 27). According to the self-evaluation document, this 'supportive environment' is defined by the Learning and Teaching, Assessment and Learning Environment Strategies and these and the quality strategy of the University are for this reason 'indissoluble and integrated'. The intention is that all concerned should be committed to 'an institutional culture which regards the teaching which supports learning as a highly valued activity'. Members of staff explained to the review team that the University's enhancement led approach entails not only a shift of emphasis from assurance to enhancement but also a closer alignment of quality assurance procedures with enhancement priorities. The team found evidence of this 'closer alignment' in the ways in which the quality assurance processes enable the University to monitor progress against its enhancement priorities and generate information and ideas for the further development of its strategies. This was particularly apparent in the dissemination by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee to schools of the outcomes of the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation process (including 'items of noteworthy practice'), the University's commitment to eliciting feedback from and

securing the representation of students (see paragraphs 101, 102), and in the greater emphasis given to enhancement in the current round of Quality Progress Reviews.

32   The review team felt that in its current form, the Quality Progress Review has the potential to serve as a powerful tool for ensuring that schools engage with the University's enhancement priorities and their related strategies. A vital role is played by the Academic Policy Section of the Registry in strengthening the linkages between quality assurance and enhancement, coordinating the work of schools and central directorates, and in supporting staff. Other key agencies are the Graduate Centre, the Learning Environment Group and the Learning Support Team, and the Learning and Teaching Committee has funds to target investment in support of institutional projects and individual initiatives. Members of staff informed the team that they particularly valued the support provided by the University's 'Change Champions' and through the Quality and Innovation in Learning and Teaching seminars and the networks that they had established as participants in the Postgraduate Certificate in University Learning and Teaching programme.

33   The University's approach to enhancement is consistent with its quality strategy and with its general framework for the management of quality and standards. The systematic way in which the University has formulated and implemented its enhancement strategies was considered by the review team to be a feature of good practice. The University's approach to the enhancement of the quality of students' learning opportunities is also complemented by its strong commitment research excellence. The Strategic Plan emphasises the 'inextricably linked and mutually dependent' relationship between research, teaching and learning, and innovation and engagement. The team's discussions with both staff and students confirmed that the research activities of staff do indeed inform their teaching and the development of the curricula, and that this is valued by students. The contribution of staff research activity to the quality of teaching and, more generally, to the quality of student learning opportunities was considered by the team to be a feature of good practice.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

34   The University defines the bodies that have the responsibilities for approving new programmes, making changes to existing programmes and modules, and undertaking annual and periodic review of programmes in their Academic Regulations Handbook. These range from the School Board of Studies to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and the Academic Policy Committee acting on behalf of Senate. The self-evaluation document reports that there are key processes operated by these bodies as part of the Quality Systems:

- Procedure for the Approval of New Programmes

- Procedure for the Approval of Changes to Programmes

- Annual Programme Review and Evaluation (Taught Programmes)

- Annual Review and Evaluation (Postgraduate Research Activity)

- Quality Progress Review

- Periodic Review of Programmes.

35   Each of these procedures is well documented on the University website with a full range of forms, templates and guidelines offering strong support for staff at all levels. The guidance includes reference to the requirements for both internal and external consultation (including students), the use of a full range of external reference points including the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales*, and specific requirements relating to the development of distance learning programmes.

Programme approval

36   It is normally expected that proposals for the introduction of new programmes or for proposals which make significant changes to the structure, content or mode of delivery of an existing programme will originate and be identified through a range of activities and sources. These include Periodic Review and Revalidation and Annual Programme Review and Evaluation. New programme proposals would typically feature in the School Strategic Planning Process. Within this strategic planning process and prior to the formulation of detailed proposals for the introduction of a new programme, the proposing school is required to inform and consult with:

- the Registry and Student Support Directorate, who will provide detailed advice on the timescale, approval process, policies and documentation required for the approval process

- the Director of Planning who will provide written advice on resource, financial and estate implications of proposals, in consultation, where appropriate

- the Information Services Directorate, for early consideration of library and computing issues

- the head(s) of any other school whose staff might either be involved in the delivery of the programme or with teaching and/or research interests in the broad subject area of the programme or offering existing programmes with similar titles

- the Public Relations and Communication and International Division who will advise on publicity.

The review team felt this integration of programme development with strategic and resource planning to be a feature of good practice.

37   Detailed proposals are developed by a school board of study, with a school advisory panel including an external 'critical friend' being established to develop the submission. The appointment of the 'critical friend' is made by the school. Following a satisfactory school response to any recommendations of the Advisory Panel, the programme is considered by a University programme approval panel, made up of members including a student, two staff members from outside the school and two members external to the University. A programme approval panel event would also be established for a major amendment to an existing programme. The Registry and Student Support Directorate oversee the Programme Approval Panel process, formally appointing all the panel members and undertaking much of the organisation. Final approval of a new programme is given by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and Senate.

38   The University recognises that the institutional processes will continue to evolve in response to internal strategic developments and external priorities, and regularly reviews them to maintain their relevance and to deliver continuous improvement. The link between strategic planning and programme development has been strengthened over recent years and the University considers this integrated approach to be an effective method of programme development. The evidence in the thematic audit for confirmed the belief that these procedures were thorough and rigorous. The review team concluded that the procedures for new programme and major change approval were indeed effective and share the view that this integrated approach is widely understood and is working effectively.

Annual programme review and evaluation

39   Once approved, all taught programmes are subject to the University's Annual Programme Review and Evaluation (Taught Programmes) process. The purpose of this Evaluation is to:

- enable schools to reflect upon and evaluate current programmes

- identify practice or innovation worthy of dissemination and to draw to the attention of the institution matters of generic interest or concern

- ensure that appropriate action is taken to address shortcomings identified by the school, institution, external bodies and external examiners

- provide the necessary information to help enable the institution to express confidence that the school's programmes continue to be valid and enable students to achieve their intended learning outcomes

- identify how institutional priorities are being implemented within schools, for example, peer review of learning and teaching, and personal development planning

- consider the responses made to external examiners' reports.

40   The University emphasised to the team, throughout the review, the importance of this aspect of its quality assurance procedures. All of the staff met by the review team confirmed the importance they attached to the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation approach. Each board of study within a School produces an evaluative report on its programmes which it forwards to the School Board. Each School board then undertakes an analysis of those reports, prepares an action plan and completes a structured synopsis which, once endorsed by the Head of School, should be presented to the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation Subcommittee by a specified date, normally at the start of January. In most years, 25 to 30 per cent of the Schools fail to complete in this timescale, but the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation Subcommittee reviews the Evaluation School reports at two separate meetings, so the University is confident that it receives all reports before the second of those subcommittee meetings, which typically takes place in March each year.

41   The procedure adopted by the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation Subcommittee is to appoint two readers, one of whom may be a student, to review to each of the School's reports. The readers only consider the synoptic report

produced on the structured template, and do not access the documents which informed that synoptic report. At the end of the cycle, the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation Subcommittee produces a feedback report to each school, including a generic report of good practice. This is a detailed report on good practice which is actively reviewed by each school through its committee structure. The particular committee which undertakes this responsibility within any individual school depends upon the precise structure that has been adopted, reflecting the variations in the size and complexity of schools. The review team noted the dates established in this cycle and reflected on whether the timing of any consideration given to the issues raised could introduce a delay of a further academic year before action was complete.

42   The review team saw the full range of Annual Programme Review and Evaluation School reports for the current academic year, each prepared using the structured templates. In the significant majority of cases the reports demonstrated the rigour of the approach and were detailed, reflective and had carefully constructed action plans. There were two cases where schools did not demonstrate full enthusiasm for engagement. In the case of one of those schools, the level of reporting fell below a threshold at which the University could retain full confidence in the system. The school was required to resubmit their Annual Programme Review and Evaluation synoptic report, demonstrating the robustness of the University's approach and in taking appropriate action to rectify the issue.

43   The cycle of review and evaluation of postgraduate research activity is similar, with the Annual Review and Evaluation Report produced by schools being considered by a subcommittee of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. As in the case of Annual Programme Review and Evaluation, the Annual Review and Evaluation subcommittee of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee appoints readers and determines the feedback to all schools, both specific issues to individual schools and generic issues to all schools. The review team concluded that the annual monitoring process is essentially working effectively, with examples in most schools of timely and detailed consideration being given to issues raised.

Quality progress review and periodic review

44   The Periodic Review and Revalidation of programmes has been designed by the University as a quinquennial review process. The University also conducts Quality Progress Reviews, which are designed to establish the extent to which schools have continued to discharge their responsibilities for the quality of education to students, their responsibilities for their quality assurance processes, and their responsibility for maintaining academic standards. The University completes each cycle of periodic reviews of all schools over a window of two or three years, with Quality Progress Reviews scheduled mid-point between successive periodic reviews. In November 2007, the University extended the current cycle and states that it took that decision in light of the 2004-05 merger. At that time, there were 17 schools awaiting completion of their Quality Progress Reviews. The current cycle of Quality Progress Reviews was scheduled for 2006 to 2008, now extended to 2009. It is reported that six schools had not completed their reviews by July 2008. The self-evaluation document reported the cycle of events as a five to seven-year cycle. The thematic audit trail confirmed that periodic review in engineering was last conducted in February 2003 and the Quality Progress

Review in engineering was conducted in 2006-07. Based on the now extended review cycle, the next periodic review is likely to commence in 2009-10, confirming the review team's view that the cycle was operating at the seven-year end of the cycle window, and potentially beyond. Consequently, the team advises the institution to ensure that cycles of review activity, both for Periodic Review and Revalidation and for Quality Progress Review, take place within the timeframes specified in University procedures.

45   Both Quality Progress Review and Periodic Review and Revalidation are based on well-defined processes, with structured templates in place to help and guide schools. The Registry and Studnt Support Directorate advise and support the schools throughout the cycle, formally appoint the external panel members and support the management of both Quality Progress Review and Periodic Review and Revalidation events.

46   Periodic Review and Revalidation events operate broadly on the same basis as programme approval, with external input in the form of 'critical friends' and external moderators. Quality Progress Review events comprise panel members external to the school, but internal to the University, reflecting the different nature and purpose of that process. Both Quality Progress Review and Periodic Review and Revalidation processes provide formal reports on the outcomes to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee, who also receive any subsequent school responses needed where recommendations are recorded. Through the cycle of Quality Progress Review and Periodic Review and Revalidation rounds, the Academic Standards and Quality Committee is able to identify and disseminate good practice.

47   The schools maintain the currency of programmes through the amendments to programme route. Minor amendment requirements are identified through Annual Programme Review and Evaluation and processed by the Board of Study and reported to the Registry and Student Support Directorate. Major amendments are managed as reported earlier in the Programme Approval section, using the programme approval panels. The staff in both thematic audit trails confirmed both the frequent use of these procedures, and their confidence that the processes effectively maintain the standing of their programmes.

48   From the evidence presented, the review team concluded that the periodic review and revalidations are based on robust procedures and provide the rigour for which they were designed. The team noted that the review periods for this Review and Revalidation were operating at the seven-year end of the stated five to seven-year cycle, rather than within the quinquennial approach of the Periodic Review and Revalidation design (see paragraph 44). However, combined with the associated minor and major amendments the team shared the confidence expressed by the University that programmes were maintained in an up-to-date state, although the degree or frequency of external input was reduced. The team was concerned that a Quality Progress Review cycle based on a seven-year window provides the University with less certainty than might be desirable that all of their processes are fully operational and introduces the possibility of issues not being identified for extended periods. As noted in paragraph 44, there can be slippage in this cycle and this has led the team to advise the institution to ensure that cycles of review activity, both for Periodic Review and Revalidation and for Quality Progress Review, take place within the timeframes specified in University procedures.

External participation in internal review processes

49   The University stated in the self-evaluation document that one of the key features of its quality strategy is its 'use of external involvement across processes, both in terms of academic input and independent assurance'. External participation is used in the approval of new programmes, the approval of major changes to existing programmes, and in the periodic review and revalidation events. The self-evaluation document noted two of the key features of its Periodic Review process as being 'external input from "critical friends", nominated by Schools to contribute to the reflective/evaluative phase of Periodic Review', and 'an Institutional process of programme Re-Validation, involving External Moderators (academics from outside the University) which makes a judgement on the level of confidence which can be drawn from the outcomes of Periodic Review…'.

50   The University procedures ensure the matching of expertise and professional standing for the appointment of external panel members through a request for programme approval proposal form. The form provides the opportunity for at least one panellist to be a member of the relevant professional or statutory body for proposals leading to accreditation for state registration or licence to practice. The University seeks to select external input from a wide range of institutions to secure specific expertise both in the area of study involved and in the higher education process in general.

51   Annual Programme Review and Evaluation also has input from external examiners and to ensure that the externals comment on a full range of issues, the University uses a reporting template for their externals. Guidelines on their role in this annual monitoring process are articulated in an external examiner handbook, which draws their attention to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and to the subject benchmark statements, published by QAA.

52   Each school engages in a cycle of Quality Progress Review where panel membership to the process is external to the school, but internal to the University. The Quality Progress Review also considers external influences and reports, and this was evidenced through the use of inputs such as an industrial advisory board in the case of engineering, and other appropriate mechanisms such as guest lecturers in the case of journalism.

53   Staff confirmed the view that the externality was both important and useful, and that they valued the external contributions in assuring and enhancing their provision. The review team found this to be a view that was commonly shared by all the staff whom they met, and evidence of the consideration of external input was witnessed in the thematic trails followed by the team. The team concluded that the University's arrangements for external participation were contributing effectively to the maintenance of standards and the management of quality and were meeting the expectations outlined by the University.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

54   The University considers external review and accreditation activity as a means of providing a useful source of evidence to complement, but not replace or substitute, their own quality procedures. There have been three subject developmental engagements in 2002, each of which was treated as a confidential report to HEFCW and considered under reserved business by the relevant University committees. In 2006, the University participated in the review of research degree programmes by QAA on behalf of HEFCW, which reported that 'the institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programme provision was appropriate and satisfactory'. The aspects of good practice and the two specific recommendations of this review have been considered by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and schools have been required to report specifically on these issues through the Annual Review and Evaluation of Postgraduate Activity for 2006-07. The team found evidence that these specific issues are being addressed by schools.

55   There are 76 public or statutory bodies that are associated with 23 schools across the University. Since 2000, the University has submitted 91 successful accreditation applications. Each application is approved by the Accreditation Submissions Subcommittee of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee prior to submission, and the specific school takes the lead responsibility, with support from the Registry and Student Support Directorate where necessary, in coordinating with the public or statutory bodies and in preparing the application. An overview of public or statutory bodies activity is reviewed annually by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and a summary report is considered and monitored by them. The self-evaluation document noted that the content of public or statutory bodies reports typically are focused on school related themes, and school responses to the public or statutory bodies are also submitted to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. These programmes, together with any resulting action plans, form part of the input to internal quality assurances processes such as Annual Programme Review and Evaluation, Quality Progress Review and Periodic Review and Revalidation. However, the thematic trails did not indicate any significant consideration of public or statutory bodies reports in either the Quality Progress Review or Annual Programme Review and Evaluation reports.

56   The self-evaluation document reported that recommendations from public or statutory bodies accreditation events have contributed to institutional planning within the University, for example, changing the level of programme offered or in contributing to strategic planning in areas such as estates and staffing levels. It also considers that participation in external review and accreditation processes provides valuable opportunities to review and benchmark itself and its provision against other relevant national and international benchmarks and standards.

57   On the basis of the information available, the review team was satisfied that the University engaged positively with external bodies and at institutional level was maintaining a consistent overview of the findings.

Assessment practices and procedures

58   The 2000 Continuation audit report advised the University that it should review 'the operation of examination boards to ensure that there is parity of treatment between departments/schools in relation to the mechanisms used to classify student awards'. The background to the previous panel's recommendation was the finding that the prevailing assessment regulations allowed for considerable variation in the calculation and classification of awards. At the same time the mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing the extent of variation that occurred were considered to be weak.

59   In response to the report's recommendations, the University instituted a number of changes to both policy and procedures. Actions have included increased central oversight of and support for examining boards; the establishment of an Awards and Progress Committee which reviews examining board compliance and formally awards degrees; the development of a University Assessment Strategy; and revision of Senate Assessment Regulations which include changes to the framework for determining degree classifications.

60   The Assessment Strategy was adopted in 2005 and provides guidance and direction on all assessment activities based on the principles of validity, reliability and explicitness. The implementation of the strategy has involved action at two levels. Regulatory change has been undertaken with the aim of enhancing consistency and, in order to embed the changes at school level, a Change Champion (a member of academic staff on secondment) was appointed in the Registry and Student Support Directorate to work with schools.

61   The conduct of assessment of both taught and research degrees is governed by Senate Regulations which are supplemented by Senate Guidelines and other procedures, and these regulations cover all operational matters relating to conduct of examinations and examination boards. The Regulations Subcommittee of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee is responsible for drafting and updating Senate Regulations in this area and the regulations are made available to both staff and students through the Academic Regulations Handbook. All written examinations are administered centrally through the Registry and Student Support Directorate, whereas schools are responsible for all other assessment, including examinations for research students. Schools are not directly accountable to the central University for the administration of school-level assessments, however, those local-level assessments which contribute significantly to final results are also covered in external examiners' reports alongside examinations. Examining boards are established by schools and are autonomous, but they must adhere to Senate regulations covering their constitution and operation with the Registry and Student Support Directorate providing advice and support to boards where needed.

62   Decisions of boards can only be overturned through verification and appeal, or if the Awards and Programmes Committee deems a decision to be unreasonable or unsustainable. Boards may be unitary or two tier depending on the structure of the programmes to which they relate. Joint degrees have joint programme specifications and handbooks and joint examining boards are held. However, from meetings with staff and from inspection of student handbooks, the review team found that the component parts of joint degrees may have different assessment criteria and even

different Pass thresholds. Any problems of inequitable treatment to which this could give rise are mitigated by cross-school liaison and the work of joint examining boards and external examiners.

63   Following the development of the Assessment Strategy, an annual report on assessment is compiled by the Registry and Student Support Directorate and presented to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. The report draws upon multiple sources including reports from external examiners, reports from the Awards and Progress Committee, student cases on appeals and unfair practice and examination data. It provides a picture of progression, completion and levels of attainment by students across the University. It also looks at measures and indicators of relating to the underlying principles of validity, reliability and explicitness. The analysis in the report supports recommendations to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee for action and notes action being taken elsewhere to address issues raised.

64   The success of the Assessment Strategy relies on its effective implementation at school level. Schools are required to articulate and disseminate information to students about all aspects of their assessment including the conventions used by examining boards to calculate degree classifications. Students, including those that met the panel, felt that although assessment criteria were available in handbooks and on the web, some students did not find them readily understandable or helpful. Schools are also obliged to develop procedures to ensure marking is reliable and consistent. The Quality Progress Review includes checks on school compliance with a variety of assessment requirements and audits various local policies and procedures.

65   Local assessment policies and procedures, which have to conform to University guidelines, are approved by boards of study and school boards. However, external examiners have noted that instances of lack of consistency of marking and assessment procedures still arise within and between schools. In reviewing materials relating to different schools, the review team noted that the University frameworks continue to permit notable variations in areas such as moderation and assessment criteria (see paragraph 28).

66   An external review of research degrees conducted in 2006 found that the arrangements for the assessment of postgraduate research students were satisfactory and commended the clear guidelines provided for the conduct of research degree examinations.

67   The University acknowledges that work needs to continue to fully implement the Assessment Strategy. To facilitate this, the change champion role has been extended to continue work with schools, and specific projects have been established such a benchmarking exercise on the proportion of First and Upper Second class degrees awarded.

68   The review team concluded that the University had addressed the concerns expressed in the Continuation audit report regarding the operation of examination boards in an appropriate and effective way. Furthermore, assessment has been identified as a strategic priority and considerable resource has been put into developing and implementing the Assessment Strategy. The University has identified clear principles which underlie good assessment practice and has put in place mechanisms to monitor their achievement.

External examiners and their reports

69   The self-evaluation document stated that external examiners 'play an indispensable role in monitoring and maintaining the academic standards of Cardiff University awards'. Furthermore, the document noted that the procedures associated with external examiners 'maximise the impact of externality' and are an institutional strength, 'in that they ensure a response by Schools on matters of detail…but also provide a holistic overview'.

70   The roles and duties of external examiners are laid down by Senate and align with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 4: External examining*. Procedures and practice relating to external examining have also been informed by QAA's *Outcomes from institutional audit* paper on external examiners. As a result of recent changes in committee responsibilities, the Academic Standards and Quality Committee has assumed responsibility for the external examining of all awards including research awards which were previously overseen by the Graduate Development Committee. External examiners on taught programmes are provided with a handbook covering all aspects of their duties. Schools are given a checklist which lists the local information to be supplied to external examiners and encourages schools to arrange for new externals to visit the school as part of their induction. The expectations of external examiners for research degrees are laid down in the Research Degrees Handbook.

71   The criteria for the nomination of external examiners are designed to ensure independence and appropriate expertise. External examiners on taught programmes are nominated by schools and the Registry and Student Support Directorate checks that nominees meet the criteria. The nomination is then forwarded to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee for formal approval. Following a recent review, the majority of nominations will in future be approved by the Registry and Student Support Directorate, acting under delegated authority from the Academic Standards and Quality Committee with only appointments that do not meet the appropriate appointment criteria, renewals and new posts going to the Chair of that Committee or the full committee. External examiners on taught degrees are normally appointed for three years with the possibility of extension to a fourth year. Senate regulations provide for the removal of an external examiner should he or she fail to fulfil their duties.

72   Nominations for external examiners for research degrees go through a broadly similar procedure to that for taught programmes and are approved by the Registry and Student Support Directorate. External examiners for collaborative provision are appointed and work within the same framework but additionally receive a briefing on the specific nature of collaborative provision. The Registry and Student Support Directorate monitors appointments of external examiners on taught programmes to ensure that schools make timely nominations. Despite this, a significant number of external examiner posts remain vacant early in the academic session, although all are normally filled before the end-of-year examinations.

73   The role of the external examiner on taught degrees is focused on the approval and moderation of examinations and any other assessment elements that contribute more than 50 per cent of the assessment on any module. External examiners are expected to attend examination boards. The Registry and Student Support

Directorate monitors attendance by external examiners at examination boards and attendance is generally good, although variable across schools.

74   External examiners on taught degrees are required to report annually to the University on the standards of awards, student performance and the soundness and fairness of assessment procedures. Reports are sent formally to the Vice-Chancellor who delegates their processing to the Registry and Student Support Directorate and they acknowledge their receipt and identify any issues that require an institutional response. The report, together with a request for a response, is then sent to the appropriate school or service department. Schools consider and respond to external examiners' reports through the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation process. The final part of the process involves the Registry and Student Support Directorate which not only sends a letter outlining the school's response to any issues raised, but also produces a generic summary report on all externals' comments (see paragraph 76). Schools are required to have mechanisms for sharing external examiners' reports on taught programmes with students and this is normally through student representatives on boards of study.

75   The Registry and Student Support Directorate also receives and scrutinises reports from external examiners on research degrees, taking up any issues with schools. Schools are required to comment on mechanisms for selecting and nominating external examiners, examination arrangements and reviewing outcomes in their Annual Programme Review and Evaluation.

76   The University maintains oversight of the opinions of external examiners through the work of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and its Annual Programme Review and Evaluation Subcommittee. The latter receives from the Registry and Student Support Directorate a detailed report covering good practice and issues identified by external examiners in the previous year together with an overview of external examiner attendance at assessment boards. The issues raised by external examiners are analysed by the Directorate in relation to the key tenets of the Assessment Strategy and, where appropriate, recommendations for action by schools, or other groups, are attached.

77   The annual review of comments by external examiners compares the frequency with which particular issues are raised over time. The report pays particular attention to issues which are persistent or growing in importance. The Registry and Student Support Directorate works proactively with schools to ensure that the good practice identified in the report is disseminated.

78   After discussion and amendment the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation Subcommittee sends the annual report on external examiners' comments to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee for discussion and noting. This Committee receives for consideration the analysis of external examiners' reports for both taught and research degrees.

79   The Awards and Progress Committee formally approves the awards of degrees to students based on the recommendations of the examination boards. Examining boards report on the processes adopted in examining boards to the Registry and Student Support Directorate which briefs the Awards and Progress Committee.

80   The review team was able to confirm that the University makes strong and scrupulous use of its external examiners and that the University regulations are designed to ensure that external examiners bring opinions based on experience and independence. Degrees cannot be awarded until the endorsement of external examiners has been checked by the Awards and Progress Committee. The Registry and Student Support Directorate carefully monitors appointments and attendance and analyses in detail the comments, both positive and negative, made by externals in relation to the University's policies relating to assessment and the maintenance of standards. This analysis feeds into advice to schools and others as well as informing the revision of policies and regulations and the University's enhancement agenda.

81   The review team found that the claims in the self-evaluation document for the importance of the role of external examiners in the management of academic standards were reflected in the use made of external examiners and their reports. The University has moved to strengthen this process further by bringing together the oversight of comments by external examiners on both taught and research degrees.

Student admission and the use made of progression and completion statistics

82   The self-evaluation document states that General Entrance Requirements for entry to the University were created during the process of acquiring Degree Awarding Powers, and have been revised subsequently to meet new legislative requirements. In 2006, an English Language Policy was adopted which specified the minimum acceptable levels of English proficiency for admission. The formal decision to admit students rests with schools with the proviso that University general entry criteria must be met. Schools are required to have a clear statement of minimum entry requirements.

83   In 2007, the Academic Standards and Quality Committee set up a Task and Finish Group, including student members, to develop a University Admissions Framework. Among its recommendations was the setting up of an Admissions Subcommittee reporting to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee to maintain oversight of admissions policies at both university and school level and to implement further recommendations of the review group.

84   Since the 2000 Continuation audit report the University has invested in technology to improve the quality and availability of student data. Changes have been made to the annual monitoring process and to central oversight by key committees with the aim of ensuring that statistical data are considered effectively at all levels.

85   A new student information system known as SIMS was introduced after the 2000 Continuation audit. SIMS supports a wide range of management processes and generates data for internal and external reporting of application, progression and completion statistics. The system was developed further following merger and reviewed in 2005-06. The review team noted that the SIMS project had focused heavily on the requirements of central users but had brought limited benefits at school level. It noted that, as a result, there was widespread dissatisfaction at local level with the system and the technology behind it. The report recommended an

action plan focused on strengthening partnership between the centre and schools, improved data access for staff and students, and improved functionality. The action plan is in the process of implementation.

86   The SIMS system provides a range of standard reports including a set of 18 reports to support annual monitoring processes and has been developed in consultation with schools. These reports cover areas such as admissions data, student numbers, entry qualifications, assessment data, progression and completion data, and the profile of degree classes. Data are provided in aggregate form with the facility for users to drill down to more detailed levels. Standard reports are produced with the intention of facilitating the use of management information in planning as well as review. Financial planning data are provided to schools in a standard format, in order to achieve a common approach and integrated planning across the institution. The system also provides the data that is uploaded on Unistats for external use.

87   The Modern IT Working Environment project is facilitating developments to make management information systems more consistent, reliable and accessible. This is part of University action to identify information deficits and increase technical capacity and regular improvements are made to the data that are made available to schools.

88   Statistical data are central to the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation process. Schools are provided with standard reports from the SIMS system but also have the freedom to use local data where this provides an equivalent or better data base. SIMS supports examination boards but its use is not yet mandatory. In some schools data is uploaded after boards have taken place but the risks involved in this process are mitigated by central checking and validation before information is passed to the Awards and Progress Committee. Once further development of the SIMS system has taken place it is expected that all examination boards will work from SIMS data.

89   The University produces an annual consolidated report on assessment. The report is provided to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee, which in turn reports to Senate and also refers issues raised in the report to other committees and subcommittees for action. The report includes commentary on student progression at aggregate level and it is proposed to extend the analysis of data to include the relative performance of students in different disciplines and from different backgrounds as part of the University's work on equality and diversity. In future years analyses of trends over time are planned.

90   The Awards and Progression Committee, established following the 2000 Continuation audit, also has responsibility for monitoring student progression and completion. For the first time this year the Awards and Progress Committee will make an annual report to Senate presenting an overview of student performance to complement the Assessment Report.

91   Reports to monitor strategies such as the admissions framework are created with data on applicant and student profiles linked to academic success. Such reports also facilitate monitoring of the effectiveness of the equality and diversity policy. The self-evaluation document noted that further work needs to be done to create mechanisms for analysing and reporting data and undertaking further impact assessments.

92   The University has defined eight broad performance areas that underpin strategy and plans at the institutional level. Performance in these areas is reviewed by the University and presented in summary form to Council. A consultative review of management information systems is currently being undertaken with the intention of refining the set of key performance indicators, which are intended to assist governance, leadership and management. Key performance indicators are expected to help achieve alignment between school activity and the University's strategies.

93   The review team concluded that the University had made considerable progress since the 2000 Continuation audit in the generation and use of management information. While not yet fully developed, the SIMS system provides the capacity to record and analyse student data at both a university and school level. Projects are underway to improve the functionality of the system and increase the use of statistical data in the management of quality and standards both centrally and locally within the institution.

94   The review team saw examples of the use of statistical data to monitor the impact of policies such the admissions framework. The team also noted the work that has commenced on developing Key Performance Indicators that will facilitate the monitoring of school activity against University policies and targets. It concluded that the University was making effective use of available statistical information and taking appropriate steps to increase the range of data available and strengthen its use at all levels.

External reference points

95   The Academic Standards and Quality Committee and its subcommittee for Regulations are responsible for ensuring that University practice reflects appropriately a range of external reference points on behalf of the Senate. The University focuses on alignment and response to such reference points and their development. However, the self-evaluation document noted that the Academic Infrastructure no longer determines institutional priorities for development as strongly as in the past in that practices based on, among other things, the *Code of practice* have been embedded. As a consequence, the focus is now on ongoing enhancement.

96   The self-evaluation document provided a number of examples of where the institution has checked that University policies are aligned with the *Code of practice.* Revisions to the *Code* are reflected during the updating of policies in relevant areas and the University makes use of wider information related to the *Code.* For example, the School's Checklist for Supporting External Examiners was developed in the light of the publication of the QAA paper on *Outcomes from institutional audit* relating to external examiners.

97   The *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* (CQFW) informs the regulations for degrees as laid down by Senate and set out in the Academic Regulations Handbook. The course approval process requires explicit reference to be made to the CQFW, subject benchmark statements and the relevant sections of the *Code of practice.* There is a University template for writing programme specifications which are checked for currency during the approval of new programmes and Periodic

Review and Revalidation. Module specifications also follow a common structure. External examiners on taught degrees are asked to comment in their annual reports on the extent to which students achieve the outcomes of any subject benchmark relevant to the degree.

98   Schemes are in place to implement the requirement for progress files through personal development planning. Following consultation with schools, a University Policy Framework was developed which sets out minimum expectations that schools can develop further locally. The review team observed an example of the successful integration of personal development planning into the curriculum of engineering students that also takes account of professional body requirements.

99   As a Welsh institution, the University is required to have a Welsh Language Scheme. It is managed by the University's Welsh Language Services department. The Scheme has been set up in consultation with the Welsh Language Board and conforms to the latter's requirements. It covers all aspects of communications as well as teaching learning and assessment. The department resides within the portfolio of the Director of Corporate Services who reports annually to the University's Council and the Welsh Language Board on its activities. The University is also sensitive to the requirements of policy emanating from the National Assembly and the requirements of Welsh bodies such as the National Health Service in Wales. The University participates in strategic discussions with the relevant Welsh Assembly Government departments and feeds priorities into its own strategies and plans.

100 The University positions itself as a member of the Russell Group and a self-critical institution that actively pursues external reference points. In order to develop its quality assurance processes further, officers of the University are actively involved in external bodies and groups concerned with the Academic Infrastructure and external reference points at regional, national and international levels. The review team concluded that the University has made full and effective use of external reference points in managing quality and standards.

Student representation at local and institutional level

101 Students are involved at all levels of the deliberative structure and this includes the representation of students on the main University committees. There are student members of Council and several of its committees, and there are student representatives on all of the academic committees of Senate with the exception of the Research Committee. Although schools are afforded a degree of discretion in determining the membership of their committees, they are required to provide opportunities for students to 'participate in making decisions about academic matters'. Staff/student panels are established for each programme and schools are expected to include student representatives on their learning and teaching committees and boards of study. The chair and secretary of each staff/student panel are drawn from the student body. Students are not, however, represented on school boards.

102 In addition to the arrangements for student representation on the University's committees, there is provision for direct student involvement in some of the University's quality assurance processes. In particular, there are student members

of school advisory panels for programme approval and students contribute to the Annual Review and Evaluation procedures through their membership of the relevant Academic Standards and Quality Committee and Graduate Development Committee subcommittees.

103 The student written submission provided a wealth of information on the actions that had been taken by the Students' Union to ensure the effectiveness of student representation. These include the establishment of an Academic Council and collaboration with the Registry to identify, train and support student representatives. The review team also noted the comprehensive and useful Course Representatives Handbook that is issued by the Students' Union. It was reported that a 'centralised course representatives system' is being developed jointly by the Union and the University, and that a member of the University staff has been appointed to liaise between the schools, University and the Students' Union.

104 In the review team's various meetings with staff and students, the latter were described as 'members' rather than 'customers' of the University. The team considered this to be an accurate description of the status accorded to students and of their relationship with the institution. It concluded that the effective partnership that has been established between the University and the Students' Union, and the University's arrangements to secure student involvement in quality assurance processes and university-level committees are features of good practice.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

105 Students informed the review team that there is a variety of mechanisms through which they are able to provide feedback on their learning experience. These were discussed in some detail in the self-evaluation document. In addition to the formal arrangements for student representation (see paragraph 101), the University and Students' Union jointly sponsor Project Q, which is a systematic cross-institutional student survey focused on the student life cycle, and in 2007 they commissioned a team of social science researchers 'to undertake a systematic, integrated analysis and evaluation of student feedback' derived from a variety of sources including the National Student Survey. There are also regular meetings between the Students' Union sabbatical officers and senior members of the University.

106 Schools administer module and programme questionnaires on a regular basis. Although these are designed and administered locally, schools are required to confirm the effectiveness of their arrangements through the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation and Quality Progress Review processes. In future, this will be complemented by the analysis and review of feedback by means of a questionnaire distributed at the student representatives' training sessions. The University and the Students' Union are also seeking to improve the system of communication between student representatives and those they represent through the proposal to create a dedicated portal attached to their respective websites.

107 Feedback from graduates is obtained by the University's Careers Service. Many, but not all, schools have advisory committees which are described as providing 'an opportunity for external persons of seniority in their field…to consider and advise the

school on such matters as policies, resources, academic provision and research'. Although there is no prescribed constitution for these committees, their membership usually includes employer representatives.

108 The students met by the review team considered that the University is generally responsive to the feedback they provide. Although they felt that committees were sometimes slow in acting upon student feedback, this channel of communication is complemented by a variety of effective mechanisms which includes the accessibility of staff, including the University's senior management, and the opportunities that this provides for direct and informal feedback. The team also found evidence to support the University's view that its quality assurance procedures are responsive and lead to effective action upon the feedback provided by students. These arrangements to obtain and respond to feedback from students provide further evidence in support of the team's conclusion that an effective partnership has been established between the University and the Students' Union to improve the quality of the student learning experience, and this was considered by the team to be an example of good practice.

Procedures for student complaints and appeals

109 Procedures for handling student complaints and appeals are set out in the Academic Regulations Handbook which is available to staff in print and accessible to all on line. The procedures have recently been reviewed to ensure alignment with the *Code of practice, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters.*

110 The recently revised complaints procedure covers matters relating to the delivery of taught and postgraduate research programmes; academic, administrative and pastoral support; and services provided by the Information Services Directorate. Separate procedures apply to other matters and services. The procedure for dealing with complaints has a number of stages. The first three stages are informal, commencing with the student raising the matter with the person responsible for the problem, and escalating to the student's tutor and finally the Head of School or Department. Each stage has specified time limits for completion. The formal parts of the procedure are managed by the Corporate Compliance Unit. The procedure provides, where appropriate, for the convening of boards and hearings to investigate the complaint. Students may be given leave to make a further appeal against the outcome of a complaint to a complaints appeal panel comprising a lay member of Council who acts as chair, a member of Senate and the President of the Students' Union. Ultimately a student can appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

111 The Corporate Compliance Unit makes an annual report on student complaints to the newly established Governance Committee. At present this focuses on complaints referred to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, but a recently introduced monitoring scheme will allow information on all complaints to be reported in future. The report will be designed to identify quality assurance issues and provide feedback to relevant bodies.

112 The Verification and Appeals Procedure for students on taught programmes, and the University Appeal Procedure for those on research degrees, allow students to

appeal against the decision of an examination board. Appeals are permitted on clearly defined grounds relating to errors in calculating marks, defects in procedures and limited extenuating circumstances affecting a candidate. For research degrees, examiner bias and inadequate supervision may also be grounds for appeal.

113 Appeals are handled by the Student Cases section of the Registry and Student Support Directorate and are considered by a pro vice-chancellor. Appeals that are accepted may be heard by a specially constituted appeal board or referred back to the exam board for further action. Appeals by research students are referred to a pro vice-chancellor who decides whether or not an appeal board should be held. Students have a right to further review by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

114 The University looks at applications for verification and appeals on taught programmes as a measure of the reliability of its assessment procedures in the Annual Report of Assessment which is presented to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. The Graduate Development Committee is responsible for taking an overview of appeals made by research students through the annual reporting process.

115 Students who met the panel stated that the complaints and appeals procedures worked effectively. Information provided by the University regarding the procedures was available and accessible and this was augmented by information, advice and assistance available from the Advice and Representation Centre.

116 The University indicated in the self-evaluation document that it considered the arrangements for handling appeals and complaints to be effective. This judgment was based on the existence of structured procedures; alignment of procedures with the *Code of practice;* the emphasis on settlement of issues at a early stage using informal processes; flexibility to ensure that students' objectives are addressed; and rejection of almost all higher appeals by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. A recent external review of research degree programmes found that the University had clear, comprehensive official procedures for handling complaints that were both appropriate and satisfactory. The review team concurred with these views and found the procedures for student complaints and academic appeals to be appropriate and effective.

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

117 The Human Resources Division of the Corporate Services Directorate has primary responsibility for staff appointment and promotion procedures and the policy frameworks for induction, probation and appraisal. Policy in these areas is coordinated by the Human Resources Committee which reports to Council via the Strategy and Resources Committee. The specific skills and attributes required for each post are listed in the person specification and job description and are the criteria used in short-listing and interview.

118 The probationary period for lecturers and professional tutors is three years. The head of school/directorate is ultimately responsible for the operation of probation within the school/directorate, but the management of the process may be delegated to the probationer's line manager/supervisor where appropriate. In addition, staff on probation may be assigned a mentor to provide independent support. Further

support is provided via the Postgraduate Certificate in University Teaching and Learning. The probation procedures require regular meetings for advice and guidance on progress, augmented by formal review meetings at key stages during the probationary period.

119 The University operates an annual appraisal system involving all staff not on probation. It aims to ensure that objectives are being progressed, to allow staff to reflect upon training and development activities undertaken, and to identify present and future development and training needs consistent with University aims and objectives. This review process provides a formal context for feedback and the determination of clear, relevant and measurable objectives for the individual appropriate to the short, medium and long-term. It also leads to the agreement of clear action plans.

120 Schools are required to maintain outcome reports from appraisals and to inform the Human Resources Division that the process has been undertaken. On completion of appraisals each school/administrative directorate produces a summary training and development plan which is forwarded to the Human Resources Division. These are collated to produce an annual University plan summarising the training and development needs of the organisation. At the time of review the policy for annual appraisal was under review. The draft version seen by the review team (draft 7) provides additional procedural guidance and clarifies that the appraisal scheme is not linked to procedures which determine pay or grading for which the University has other identified processes.

121 The procedures in relation to the recognition and reward of staff in terms of their contributions to learning and teaching are built into the criteria used to determine promotion at all relevant levels. Applicants are required to demonstrate contributions to research, learning and teaching, and to the wider mission of the University and the work of the school. They are also required to supply evidence of excellence in one area and ability and effectiveness in the remaining two. The threshold criterion is national excellence in the case of promotion to senior lecturer, near international excellence in the case of reader, and international excellence for the award of a personal Chair. Similar criteria for recognition and reward apply in the case of academic staff seeking promotion from Grade 7 to Grade 8 with a teaching and scholarship profile.

122 From a study of the documentation associated with the appointment, appraisal and promotion procedures and feedback from staff in the thematic trails, the review team concluded that the University's procedures are appropriate for assuring the quality of academic provision in this context.

Assurance of the quality of teaching: staff support and development

123 Successful completion of Module 1 (30 credits) of the University Postgraduate Certificate in University Teaching and Learning is a requirement of the probation process for lecturers and professional tutors. It is also required for other probationary staff with a substantial role in supporting learning and teaching where this has been identified as necessary for the role. This requirement may be waived for individuals who can provide documentary evidence of the award of a comparable qualification,

or adjusted for individuals who can demonstrate significant teaching experience. To achieve the full Postgraduate Certificate in University Teaching and Learning qualification (60 credits) staff must complete Module 2. This enables participants to select an aspect of teaching practice for in-depth study. In November 2007 the Higher Education Academy accredited the Postgraduate Certificate in University Teaching and Learning Module 1 and the full Programme at Standard Two (Fellow Status) against the National Professional Standards Framework (2006). The value of this Postgraduate Certificate was highlighted by staff in a number of meetings and the review team concluded that this aspect of training for new staff was appropriate and well supported.

124 A comprehensive range of teaching, learning and assessment courses is also available for all members of staff and research postgraduates through the University's Staff Development Programme, which is publicised twice a year. These include a comprehensive series of practical and theoretical courses that cover a large range of topics, including learning, teaching and assessment, personal development, and equality and diversity. The review team was particularly impressed with the systematic approach that has been adopted in the context of staff support and professional development at university level. A number of workshops have also been designed specifically to support staff in areas that have been identified for enhancement, such as practical ways of providing efficient and effective feedback to students. Skills training workshops for supervisors of research students and staff who are examining a research degree for the first time are coordinated by the graduate schools.

125 The policy for the Peer Review of Learning and Teaching was revised in 2006. It is compulsory for all academic staff, flexible and light touch in approach, but also specific in its requirements for both schools and individual staff. The Policy Framework articulates the aims and objectives and the minimum expected standards of practice, with an emphasis on reflection, development and enhancement. It has proved particularly valuable in the context of the Postgraduate Certificate in University Teaching and Learning programme in terms of stimulating cross-school teaching, enquiry projects, and discussion groups.

126 One of the key recommendations of the previous Continuation audit was the advisability of ensuring appropriate training of research students prior to their involvement in teaching. The University Code of Practice, section 1, which covers the Involvement of Postgraduate Research Students in Teaching Activities was amended in 2003. Specifically, heads of schools are responsible for ensuring that postgraduate research students receive, as a minimum, the equivalent of one day's training specific to their roles prior to carrying out any teaching duties. In addition to general training guidance must also be given that relates specifically to the module/course. All student teachers must have a mentor who must observe at least two teaching sessions. Courses on teaching, demonstrating and assessment skills are now coordinated by the University's graduate schools and form part of the Research Students' Skills Development Programme.

127 Meetings with research students in the thematic trails suggest there may be still be some variability in the effectiveness of the mechanisms used by different schools to ensure that these requirements are met in a timely manner. Overall, however, the review team concluded that the recommendation from the Continuation audit has been suitably addressed.

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

128 At its meeting of 25 June 2005, the Academic Standards and Quality Committee adopted the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. In 2005-06, the University considered its approach to flexible and distributed learning, recognising that it could impact on the Strategy and Resources Committee's policy on the Criteria for Strategic Investment and on each of the strategies for Assessment, Learning Environment, and Learning and Teaching. This is contextualised within an overarching policy of the University only wishing to engage in flexible and distributed learning activity when:

- developments can be shown to be leading towards University strategic goals

- it is in the interest of academic advancement, and

- there is a sound business case for doing so (both in terms of educational and financial viability).

129 The impact on the Learning and Teaching Strategy of flexible and distributed learning reflects a teaching objective that 'creates no unnecessary barriers to participation, and, further, is inclusive and fully accessible to all our students' and also under its diversity and equality agenda that promotes 'a range of methods of delivery'.

130 This has resulted in a framework for the limited number of occasions to date when the option for flexible and distributed learning has been considered, recognising that Cardiff maintains a predominantly campus-based approach to programme delivery. The framework sets the principles with respect to academic standards and awards, learning opportunities and quality assurance procedures. It also notes the requirement for ensuring that staff who are engaged in delivering or supporting a flexible and distributed learning programme are suitably qualified for the role that they will perform, and that appropriate training may be needed to support those staff members.

131 The framework also specifies the need to ensure students each receive comparable information to campus-based students. It also outlines that student support mechanisms need to be comparable, and students following flexible and distributed learning programmes should be clearly appraised before enrolling on the programme as to what support (including pastoral support) is available.

132 The review team noted the significant delivery of a flexible and distributed learning programme in dermatology and were advised that the migration from paper-based flexible and distributed learning to online delivery had been considered under a minor amendments change to the programme prior to the implementation of the 2006 Flexible and Distributed Learning Strategy. The team was assured that due consideration had been given to the management of the student experience and to maintaining student engagement with the programme, and concluded that the confidence the University had in this example was well founded.

Learning support resources

133 The self-evaluation document reported that the Information Services Directorate provides the library and information technology infrastructure and supports the Learning Environment directly in partnership with other directorates. A fundamental review of the library provision was undertaken in 2004-05 which resulted in a range of improvements. The student written submission noted that, overall, the learning facilities were praised by participants to the Project Q Phase 2 undergraduate focus groups, in particular, the library facilities, access to computers and information technology support, and the use of a virtual learning environment, although this seemed to differ from one school to the next depending on the level of engagement the school staff had with the virtual learning environment at the time. Final-year participants to the 2006 National Student Survey rated the University's learning resources as excellent.

134 The Learning Environment Strategy, 2005-08, notes that three key drivers are shaping the emergence of new learning environments. These are as follows:

- the pedagogical driver: more student-centred, collaborative and group-based learning

- the student experience driver: the expectations of 'digital natives' and the 'student as customer'

- the operational driver: the efficient, effective and sustainable management of increasingly complex institutions.

135 The University has a clear position on what it intends to achieve for its learning resource base, and it states 'the Learning Environment Strategy represents a key step in moving towards the planning and delivery of a learning environment at Cardiff University that approaches comparison with the description: World Class'. In striving for this standard it recognises that the Learning and Teaching Strategy requires the establishment of an integrated strategic planning process for all aspects of investment in the learning environment. The Learning and Teaching Strategy indicates that the integration occurs through 'a partnership approach, coordinated by the Registry and Student Support Directorate, between the Information Services Directorate and Physical Financial Resources Directorate, academic Schools and other stakeholders at Cardiff'.

136 The strategic plans of the two schools comprising the thematic trails would suggest that the University has made good progress in delivering this agenda, but several issues remain unresolved. An emerging theme appears to be both the lack of and quality of physical space. The strategic plan for one of the schools notes '"in very real and immediate ways the current learning environment will seriously restrict our plans to develop the new portfolio of courses listed above". This quote is taken from our 2003 Strategic Plan. It needs to be repeated in this 2006 version but with a difference. Despite everything we have done to make maximum use of the available space since 2003, we have actually reached the point where our plans are now seriously restricted by space which has, quite simply, run out'.

137 The strategic plan for another school raises similar concerns noting 'space constraints are a considerable challenge for the School if this plan is adopted by the University, and are likely to pose a threat to the achievement of its strategic aims.

Our estimate is that the planned expansion…will mean that the School will become progressively under allocated over this planning period, by at least 20%'.

138 In considering these issues and those from other schools, the 2007 Summary Analysis of School Strategic Plans reflects how the University is recognising this position and ensuring that its strategic investment reflects these circumstances.

139 The review team concluded that the integrated approach to the provision of learning support resources was effective in identifying and planning for the secure delivery of its full range of programmes of study, while recognising that there remains a physical space constraint in some academic areas. The demonstration of the University's capability to effectively prioritise and develop in an integrated and strategic way underpins the team's confidence.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

140 The Academic Policy Section of the Registry and the Registry and Student Support Directorate is the key agency for coordinating learner support, providing strategic and practical input into the implementation of the Assessment, Learning Environment and Learning and Teaching Strategies. The schools have primary responsibility for the delivery of academic guidance, support and supervision in association with the Information Services Directorate, the Graduate Centre and graduate schools, and the Careers Service. The English Language Centre provides pre and in-session language support for international students. The Maths Support Centre and the Writing Centre provide specialist help and support to students in relevant academic Schools. Training for staff in the delivery of support is provided by the Human Resources Division of Corporate Services Directorate.

141 In addition to opportunities for skills development embedded within curricula, there are additional free-standing courses and workshops that are supported by opportunities for students to engage with personal development plans. A University-wide policy framework has been adopted for personal development plans but they are only mandatory where it is a requirement for professional training. In other schools, engagement with personal development plans by students is optional, often being offered through the personal tutorial system. All students in taught programmes are assigned personal tutors and their role is described in the Senate Regulation for Personal Tutors and in a Policy Framework for the Provision of Personal Tutor Support for Students. These documents together with other sources of relevant advice are provided in the Personal Tutors' Handbook, which is updated and issued annually.

142 The views of students on the personal tutor system vary. The student written submission notes that the personal tutor system received mixed reports, suggesting that the quality of support varied on an individual basis, and the key findings section of the report on the undergraduate focus groups participating in Phase 2 of Project Q produced in May 2007 notes that personal tutors are not seen as a key feature. Informal structures are often used for guidance and support and these are seen as providing greater added-value. However the overwhelming feedback from these surveys and also the views expressed by students in both trails was that staff were helpful, welcoming, enthusiastic, supportive, and always available.

143 One issue raised both in the student written submission and also student meetings was the variability experienced in terms of the quality and the speed of academic feedback on submitted work. Attention is also drawn in the student written submission to the lower than average scores recorded in the 2006 National Student Survey in terms of Assessment and Feedback and also Personal Development. The University is aware of this variability which was considered as part of Project Q and is taking proactive steps to address shortcomings in this context through its enhancement agenda. The Senate Assessment Regulations now require schools to articulate the procedures employed to ensure reliability and consistency of marking and feedback. However, the students met during the review commented that the arrangements for feedback, notably that this should be normally received within four weeks of submission of the assessment, are not yet uniformly implemented in schools.

144 In terms of postgraduate research students, the Graduate Development Committee is the coordinating body for all matters relating to the enhancement of graduate study at the University and is responsible for the development and implementation of strategies in support of assuring and enhancing the postgraduate student experience. The needs of research students are addressed through the Research Students' Skills Development Programme which is designed to give research students the opportunity to develop the skills needed to complete their research degree on time and to enhance their employability.

145 Monitoring of all aspects of postgraduate study is provided by the Annual Review of Postgraduate Activity, which complements the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation for undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses. Each school is required to have a nominated Postgraduate Director of Studies, with key responsibilities in terms of ensuring that the requirements of the University Code of Practice on Research Degrees are met. The University requires each student to have two supervisors with support from other advisers, who may be involved in the progress-monitoring processes applied across the institution. The survey carried out for the student written submission reports favourably on the arrangements for supervision, most postgraduate students reporting that they were happy with their experience, a view confirmed by the postgraduate students met in both school trails.

Personal support and guidance

146 The University's Counselling Service is co-located and co-managed alongside the Staff Counselling Service. It provides one-stop student support centres on each of the University's main campuses for personal, financial and broad academic matters providing confidential help, support and advice. These centres provide online and written materials and proactive group work at student locations for those unable/unwilling to come to the centre and also provide disability and dyslexia support. In addition, schools have identified disability contacts who liaise with the student support centre. All services are available to students, applicants and parents, and there are strong links with the Students' Union.

147 From session 2007-08, the Counselling Service has introduced a new model with a change of emphasis to brief solution focused therapy in the first instance, and a managed care system of delivery. The Service is able to provide a British Sign

Language counsellor if required and has a counsellor with a specialist interest in biomedical engineering students. It can also provide counselling through the medium of Welsh. In terms of monitoring, the effectiveness of each support service is self-evaluated by that service rather than via an external monitoring procedure. There is, however, ongoing development to identify the most appropriate means of measuring outputs, such as the use of 'CORE' (Clinical Outcomes Routine Evaluation) in the counselling and advisory services.

148 The student written submission makes it clear that personal support generally works well, but not always through the personal tutor system. In the most recent Students' Union survey carried out in March 2007, respondents expressed overall satisfaction with the welfare support provided by both the University and the Union, with particular praise for the Student Development Unit and Student Volunteering Cardiff. Overseas students, however, find it more difficult than home students to adapt and require additional support in the early stages of arrival. The University is taking proactive steps to address this issue and both the International Division and the Graduate Centre were identified by students as providing good-quality support. It was suggested however at a meeting with representatives of the Students' Union that some schools could play a more proactive role in providing welfare support for postgraduate research students and that there were some concerns that the Graduate Centre was not achieving its full potential in this regard .

149 Although the student support centres are highly valued, some concerns were expressed that the quality of support and information at the Heath Park Campus was less than that that provided at the Cathays Campus. The Students' Union is currently seeking improvements and forums have been organised to involve Heath Campus-based students in the development of an improved service. It was confirmed at a meeting with senior staff that the capital investment programme at this campus is ongoing and the welfare requirements of Heath Park students were a major consideration, and the review team encourages the University to continue working with the Students' Union to seek appropriate solutions to the issues raised.

Collaborative provision

150 Although the University of Wales, Cardiff, had little collaborative provision, the merger with the University of Wales College of Medicine brought a number of existing arrangements into the new institution. In one of its meetings with staff the review team was informed that the development of new collaborative provision is not a current priority because the University does not need the income that this would generate, and it is not prepared to accept the level of risk that it would entail. In other meetings, the team learned that several new partnerships were being considered and that staff expected these to yield academic benefits as well as provide opportunities for income generation and the recruitment of additional international students. It was later confirmed that the University is prepared to consider new proposals for collaborative provision and that it is in the process of developing procedures to enable it to manage the attendant risks.

151 At the time of the present review, the University was formulating an International Strategy. Although the working document signalled an intention to collaborate with

'academic, business and other partners', the detail of the strategy had not been sufficiently developed to enable the review team to determine whether the University intended to establish the kinds of partnership that would be within the scope of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. However, it was apparent from other documents that the University was placing itself in a state of readiness for an expansion of this area of activity.

152 In June 2006, the Academic Standards and Quality Committee agreed to the establishment of a Collaborative Programmes Subgroup (CPSG) to consider inter alia proposals for new collaborative provision and to advise the Committee on any proposed changes to the University's Collaborative Provision Framework. The minutes of the first meeting of CPSG recorded the approval of, and proposals for, several new collaborative arrangements following the publication of the Framework in October 2006. While the Framework acknowledged that 'collaborative provision is not currently a...strategic goal', the University is both 'aware of the potential benefits and enhancements that collaborative may bring' and 'recognises the potential risks to reputation and academic standards that unrestricted engagement in collaborative provision could pose'.

153 In addition to the collaborative provision that the University inherited from UWCM, the review team was supplied with a list of some 13 partnerships which were variously described as 'two plus two', 'four plus one' 'student exchange' and 'joint' programmes. The team established that, although the partnership agreements remain active, of these only three student exchange arrangements have current student enrolments. Staff confirmed that in all 13 cases the University retains responsibility for the consideration of applications for admission of individual students once they have completed their programmes of study in the partner organisation.

154 The University also maintains a dual award arrangement with the Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Bordeaux). This was established in 2002, predating the approval of the Collaborative Provision Framework. The review team found that the University had validated the programme having given careful consideration to a range of academic and regulatory issues. Although the validation report did not address matters relating to the management of the partnership, it was apparent from other documentation supplied to the team that the partner is visited by University staff on at least a biannual basis, and that issues relating to the programme are addressed in the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation report produced by the relevant University board of studies.

155 The quality assurance of collaborative provision 'is subject to at least the same processes as provision delivered within Cardiff'. This includes, where appropriate, the appointment of the same external examiners to oversee both the programmes delivered within Cardiff and those delivered on a collaborative basis. Collaborative programmes are also subject to the University's standard procedures for the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation, and boards of study and school boards are expected to make specific reference to any collaborative provision when completing their annual review pro formas.

156 The only specific arrangement that is made for the quality assurance of collaborative provision is the requirement that initial approval of a proposed partnership, and of the structure and rationale of the provision, must be obtained from the Collaborative Programmes Subgroup of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. However, as part of the current development of its arrangements, recent consideration has been given to the monitoring of collaborative programmes. The University may wish to consider the implications of this initiative and its special requirements for initial approval in the context of its quality strategy and in particular the principles of proportionality and the adaptation of quality assurance procedures 'to fit the specific needs of the areas under review'.

157 The review team concluded that, although the University's current collaborative provision is limited, the scale of this activity is likely to increase. From meetings with staff and scrutiny of documentation, the team formed the view that there is an apparent lack of clarity in the ways in which the University defines the various types of collaborative provision and some uncertainty over the distinction between those arrangements which fall within the scope of the *Code of practice, Section 2,* and those which do not (see paragraph 153). The team also considered that the extent to which general quality management responsibilities are delegated to schools (see paragraph 22) and the University's arrangements for the annual monitoring of collaborative programmes could impair the visibility and supervision of activity at school level and thus impede the Academic Standards and Quality Committee in discharging its obligations for assuring the quality and standards of such provision. In recognition of the work being undertaken currently by the Collaborative Programmes Subgroup, it is recommended that the University considers the desirability of reviewing its procedures and policies to ensure that the particular risks associated with this area of activity are identified and appropriately managed.

Section 3: The review investigations – published information

The students' experience of published and other information

158 The accuracy of the information published by the University in terms of prospectuses, programme descriptors and advertisements, both electronically and in a paper format, was specially reviewed for the student written submission by a series of focus groups drawn from second year undergraduates and postgraduate students. This augments the information available from the National Student Survey, the online Student Satisfaction Survey and the outcomes of Phase 1 of Project Q. The student written submission concluded that the information published by the University and sent out to both undergraduate and postgraduate students prior to enrolment was generally comparable to, or much better than, those they had received from other universities to which they had applied.

159 The information received at Open/Visit days was also identified as particularly good in comparison to similar events elsewhere. However, respondents to the 2006 Project Q survey identified a number of areas where there was still room for improvement in terms of published information received at the admissions stage.

These findings led to an action plan for enrolment in 2007 which included an online enrolment system administered at university rather than school level. The experiences of the students met in both trails broadly confirmed these findings.

160 One area singled out by the students contributing to the student written submission for particular criticism concerns the literature provided by the residence and catering division which is described as too vague and misleading at times. Their survey also indicates that there appears to be a generally held view that the information provided for students at the Heath Campus or on work placement elsewhere is not as good as that provided for the main campus.

161 The meetings with students generally confirmed the perspective emerging from the student written submission and Project Q, and provided an opportunity for the review team to sample key features of the student experience in this context at first hand. Although there is general satisfaction with the publication of assessment criteria in school handbooks students suggested that there was scope for improving their articulation, especially in the context of providing feedback on submitted work. They were also able to confirm that the information on complaints and appeals was available and the procedures to be followed in this context generally worked well. The team concluded that the arrangements for assuring the student experience in this context were appropriate and, subject to further consideration of the issues identified in paragraph 159, suitably assured.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

162 The articulation in the self-evaluation document of the policies and procedures used by the University in terms of assuring the quality and accuracy of published information draws specific attention to the responsibilities of the Strategic Development Directorate (Public Relations Section), the Registry and Student Support Directorate, and the schools in securing this aspect of provision. It is assured, in turn, by internal and external peer review, external examiners, verification checks by University auditors and the Higher Education Statistics Agency, and as a key component of Quality Progress Review.

163 The Institution recognises the importance and value of current, accurate and reliable information for stakeholders and the need to ensure that it is regularly monitored and reviewed. Feedback is routinely obtained in a number of ways, notably electronic questionnaires, response cards, focus groups, personal comments/suggestions for improvement, and Project Q, and useful examples are provided on specific instances of feedback and corrective and/or enhancement based action. External examiner reports also provide a key assurance component in this context.

164 Following consideration of the feedback, there is a round of consultation with specialists in the University (and externally if appropriate) to ensure that information is up-to-date and accurate. Internally, these specialists include school admissions tutors, staff in residences, and the Registry and Student Support Directorate. Externally, specialists include staff from UCAS, the British Council, the Welsh Assembly Government, and the Department for Education and Skills.

165 Having taken into account the views of students as expressed in the student

written submission and in meetings, the review team concluded from their own scrutiny of published information that the arrangements were generally working well. The devolution of responsibility for checking the accuracy of school information to the schools themselves places some constraints on the effectiveness of the arrangements for ensuring an institutional overview, although there is an expectation that schools liaise with the Strategic Development Directorate when publishing their own brochures and web pages for prospective students.

Findings

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

166 The key features of the University's procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review are the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation, Quality Progress Review and Periodic Review and Revalidation. The review team considered the defined procedures for these review processes to be robust and conducive to assuring the standards of the University's awards.

167 Programme approval is tightly coupled with schools strategic planning, and academic developments occur in tandem with central services support, such as publicity, estates etc. The University expressed confidence in this integrated approach and the review team shared this confidence.

168 Many schools do not complete their Annual Programme Review and Evaluation reporting within the established timescales, giving rise to potential delays in reacting to any emerging issues. The feedback presented to schools by the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation Subcommittee on the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation process included both specific and generic information, including a significant section on identified good practice. Schools have procedures in place to consider this feedback and to identify which areas of good practice may be adopted by themselves, thus achieving effective dissemination.

169 The quinquennial cycle for Periodic Review and Revalidation, and Quality Progress Review are essentially operating as a seven-year cycle and potentially longer. This gave the review team concern in the case of Quality Progress Review, that the University may have less certainty than might be advisable that all of their processes are fully operational and introduces the possibility of issues not being identified for extended periods. The team therefore advises the institution to ensure that cycles of review activity, both for Periodic Review and Revalidation and for Quality Progress Review, take place within the timeframes specified in University procedures.

170 The University has wide student participation across many of its committees. Students also provide feedback at module and programme level, thus informing the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation process. At institutional level and through the National Student Survey, a strong analysis and reporting exercise is undertaken in collaboration with the Students' Union (Project Q). The University was confident that this approach was capturing a wide range of student input, and on the basis of the evidence seen, the review team shared this confidence.

171 The University engages with a wide range of professional and statutory bodies to complement its quality assurance procedures. Some schools have industrial advisory boards and, particularly in the case of schools based on the Heath Campus, significant employer input.

172 The University has predominantly a campus-based student population, but the University seeks not to constrain its activities, and recognises that in its aims to become a world-class institution it may enter into collaborative arrangements. It has

in place a detailed set of procedures to manage collaborative and flexible and distributed learning activities, but both are relatively low-scale. Existing arrangements were largely in place prior to the adoption of the current procedures, so the extent to which they are successfully operating has not been fully established. In view of this, the review team considers it desirable for the University to review the policies and procedures for collaborative provision to ensure that the particular risks associated with this area of activity are identified and appropriately managed.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

173 The University works closely with the Academic Infrastructure, and the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* in setting the standards of its degrees. The standards students are expected to achieve are laid out in the programme specifications and module descriptions developed for each taught degree and, in the case of research degrees, through the Criteria for Award within the Senate Regulations. The University has recently developed and adopted a new Assessment Strategy which aims to promote validity, reliability and transparency in the assessment process. The impact of the strategy is intended both to improve the measure of student attainment and also to enhance the articulation and communication of standards to both staff and students. Schools have significant responsibilities for the standards of awards in their respective discipline areas and the ability to develop local policies and conventions within the University's regulatory framework. A further intended impact of the Assessment Strategy is to increase consistency in assessment across the institution. However the review team noted that the lack of formal reporting upward to the University of key school-level committees responsible for matters relating to academic standards, and considered that it would be desirable for the University to consider the need for formal accountability of such bodies to Senate.

174 External examiners play a central role in securing the standards of the University's awards both on taught and research degrees. The regulations for the appointment of external examiners are designed to ensure that those appointed are both independent and suitably qualified and experienced. Appointments are monitored to ensure that vacancies do not remain unfilled.

175 The views of external examiners are sought on the standards of assessments, particularly examinations, and on the processes and standards of marking. External examiners are involved in the boards that agree students' marks and no degree may be awarded without the endorsement of the relevant external examiner. The comments and advice of external examiners are used to secure the standards of individual awards, and to assist the maintenance of standards at programme, school and institutional level through annual evaluative reviews of their reports. On the basis of the evidence seen, the review team considers the use made of external examiners and their reports to be effective in helping to secure academic standards.

176 In addition to external examiners the University makes extensive use of external opinion in securing the standards of its degrees. The views of external experts are sought in the process of approving new programmes and the ongoing cycle of period review of programmes. A large number of programmes offered by the University are

accredited by external public or statutory bodies. The University makes use of the reports of these bodies as a further check on the standards of its awards.

177 The University has strengthened its capacity to monitor the standards achieved by students through investment in a student database (SIMS) and the establishment of the Awards and Progression Committee. After initial difficulties, the functionality of SIMS is increasing and reports are now available at programme, school and institutional level to support processes such as annual review. The University is working actively to evaluate its standards from the perspective of equality and diversity.

178 The University uses the same mechanisms to secure standards in both its home and collaborative provision. In addition, it recognises the risks posed by collaborative working and has enhanced some of its procedures to match this, for example, by augmenting the process of programme approval for collaborative provision. At present the level of collaborative activity is very low but should it be increased in future, the review team concluded that it would be desirable for the University to develop greater clarity on the different types of collaboration undertaken and should also consider further augmentation of its standard quality assurance processes in relation to collaborative provision.

179 The University in its self-evaluation document states that it 'has confidence in the structures that assure the standards of its awards'. On the basis of documents read and discussions held with staff and students, the review team endorsed this view.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

180 The Information Services Directorate provides the infrastructure to support the library and information technology in association with the Physical and Financial Resources Directorate, academic schools and other stakeholders. Overall, students are very satisfied with the learning facilities, in particular the library facilities, access to computers, and information technology support. The use of the virtual learning environment is also generally praised, although some variability is noted depending on the level of engagement by staff in the schools.

181 The University has implemented a strategic Learning Environment Strategy for the planning and delivery of all aspects the learning environment, including library and information technology provision. The strategic plans of the two schools of the thematic trails suggest that good progress has been made in delivering this agenda, the integrated approach proving effective in ensuring the secure delivery of learning support resources for the full range of programmes of study.

182 An emerging theme, however, appears to be the lack and quality of physical space. The 2007 Summary Analysis of School Strategic Plans reflects on this position and the steps being taken by the University to address this issue. The review team concluded that space issues were a material consideration and encourage the University to continue to seek the most appropriate solutions.

183 The academic schools have primary responsibility for the delivery of academic guidance. Opportunities for skills development within the curricula are supported by additional workshops, free-standing courses, and opportunities for students to engage

with personal development plans. Personal development plans are optional except where they are a requirement of an accredited course.

184 A key aspect of all taught provision, undergraduate and postgraduate, is the University-wide Personal Tutor system which operates within schools. Although student views on this system are mixed, when taken together with the support provided by all academic staff the overall view is that students are generally well supported. Some variability, however, has been identified in terms of the quality and speed of academic feedback on submitted work.

185 In terms of personal welfare overall satisfaction is expressed in terms of the support provided both by the University and the Students' Union. Some shortcomings, however, have been identified in terms of the quality of provision at the Heath Campus. Steps are being taken to address these both by the Student's Union and also the University, which is seeking improvements to the Campus infrastructure to facilitate better arrangements.

186 The feedback on arrangements for supervision of postgraduate research students is generally very positive. The University also makes provision for the special requirements of international students, especially during the processes of induction. In the case of some schools, however, there may be useful opportunities to enhance the arrangements for personal support at a more local level, and the review team would wish to encourage such a strategy.

187 The arrangements for staff appointment, appraisal and reward are suitably assured, with clear criteria for recognising achievements in teaching at all levels of promotion. The arrangements for staff support and professional development are especially notable, underpinned by a comprehensive programme of supporting courses and workshops. The review team concluded that appropriate training is provided for research students who undertake teaching in schools, with courses on teaching, demonstrating and assessment skills coordinated by the University's graduate schools.

External involvement in internal quality assurance mechanisms

188 The University's view is that it uses external participation at key stages, to provide confidence that the quality and standards of new programmes are appropriate and to identify opportunities for enhancement. Critical friends are appointed during the programme development stage and external moderators are appointed in the approval stage. The initiation of a new programme development may also have been informed by external examiners on existing programmes, professional or statutory bodies' events or industrial advisory boards.

189 Expressions of confidence are stated in other sections of the self-evaluation document about the involvement of external inputs to the periodic review and programme amendment process, where a similar range of external engagement is noted.

190 Existing programmes have an external examiner appointed, and they report using a structured form to ensure a range of inputs is considered. External examiners are

provided with a handbook outlining their responsibilities and indicating appropriate external benchmarks, such as the subject benchmark statement. The external examiners' reports feed in to the Annual Programme Review and Evaluation process and following a period of analysis and distillation, an overview report is produced; external examiners are also appointed for the examination of research degrees.

191 The University states these procedures provide it with confidence in its quality and standards, and the review team believe this confidence to be well founded.

The institution's use of national reference points

192 As a Welsh institution, Cardiff is required to engage with a wider range of national reference points than its English counterparts. Welsh Assembly Group policies and priorities are reflected in the University's strategy. The University has a Welsh language scheme which meets the requirements of the Welsh Language Board.

193 Through the Academic Standards and Quality Committee, the University monitors developments in the Academic Infrastructure and checks Cardiff's alignment to the *Code of practice*. The Welsh educational system requires compliance with the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales,* which together with the FHEQ, informs the University's degree structures, assessment and admissions policies. Subject benchmarks, where available, are used to inform programme design. Programme specifications are prepared for all courses using a common template: they are widely available and updated regularly. Schemes are in place to develop progress files for all students.

194 The review team concluded that the University makes full and effective use of external reference points and complies with the requirements of the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* and the Welsh Language Board. The University also promotes implementation of the higher education policies of the Welsh Assembly.

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

195 The University's approach to enhancement is consistent with its quality strategy and with its general framework for the management of quality and standards. The systematic way in which the University has formulated and implemented its enhancement strategies was considered by the review team to be a feature of good practice. The University's approach to the enhancement of the quality of students' learning opportunities is also complemented by its strong commitment to research excellence, and the contribution of staff research activity to the quality of teaching and, more generally, to the quality of student learning opportunities, which is a feature of good practice.

Reliability of information

196 The institution recognises the importance and value of current, accurate and reliable information for stakeholders and the need to ensure that it is regularly monitored and reviewed. Feedback is routinely obtained in a number of ways, including electronic questionnaires and focus groups, with additional information

emerging from Project Q. External examiner reports also provide a key quality assurance component in this context.

197 Although the Strategic Development Directorate has a key responsibility in quality assurance at a university level, responsibility for checking the accuracy of school information is devolved to the schools themselves in the first instance, placing particular responsibilities on the latter to ensure effective communications with the Directorate.

198 The quality of student handbooks and other school-specific information is generally considered as reliable and of a suitably consistent quality across the University. Some variability in the articulation of assessment criteria has been noted by students, however, and this may be a subject for further attention as part of the ongoing enhancement agenda of the University. There is also an issue with the timeliness of some publications, notably those of specific relevance to students during the processes of induction. The recent change to an online enrolment system is intended to rectify a number of the challenges that have been identified in this context.

199 The students' experience of published information at both university and school level is generally very positive, and the review team's own scrutiny of the materials concurs with this view.

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

200 The review team found that the self-evaluation document was a useful and comprehensive document which reflected the complexity of the institution and its recent history. Although the evaluative content of the self-evaluation document was limited, it did provide a clear account of the issues that the University had had to address as a consequence of the significant changes that had occurred over the past seven years and since the previous audit.

Features of good practice

201 The following features of good practice were noted:

- the systematic formulation and implementation of the University's enhancement strategies (paragraph 33)

- the contribution of staff research activity to the quality of teaching and to the quality of student learning opportunities generally (paragraph 33)

- the integration of programme development with strategic and resource planning (paragraph 36)

- the arrangements established by the University to secure student involvement in quality assurance processes and institution-level committees (paragraph 104)

- the effective partnership between the University and the Students' Union to improve the quality of the student learning experience (paragraph 108)

- the systematic approach to staff support and professional development (paragraph 124).

Recommendations for action

202 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

● to ensure that cycles of review activity, both for Periodic Review and Revalidation and for Quality Progress Review, take place within the timeframes specified in University procedures (paragraphs 44, 48, 169).

203 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

● to consider the need for accountability to Senate of school-level committees, in the context of the University's framework for the management of academic quality and standards (paragraphs 28, 65, 173)

● to review the policies and procedures for collaborative provision to ensure that the particular risks associated with this area of activity are identified and appropriately managed (paragraphs 157, 172).

Appendix

Cardiff University's response to the institutional review report

Cardiff University welcomes the findings of the Institutional Review report. It is pleased that confidence has been expressed in the University's management of academic quality and standards and in the accuracy of its published information. The University is also pleased to note that the report identifies many features of good practice, including the University's enhancement strategies; the effective partnership between the University and the Students' Union to improve the student learning experience; the contribution of staff research to the quality of teaching and learning; and the systematic approach to staff support and professional development.

Appropriate steps will be taken to consider the three recommendations of the report. The highlighted features of good practice will be built upon as part of the University's commitment to enhancing the quality of the student experience.

The University would wish to thank the team for the thorough and constructive way in which the review was carried out.