The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

University of Wales

MAY 2004

Institutional review

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Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) 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 the Agency carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In Wales this process is known as institutional review. The Agency 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; and
- 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 the Agency 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 the 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 the Agency to the institution nine months before the review visit;
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the review visit;
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the review visit;
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the review team five weeks before the review visit;
- the review visit, which lasts five days;
- the publication of a report on the review team's judgements and findings 22 weeks after the review visit.

The evidence for the review

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

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

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

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

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Summary

Introduction

A team of reviewers from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) visited the University of Wales (the University) from 24 to 28 May 2004 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 review team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and to a student representative. 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 academic award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK.

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

In institutional review both academic standards and academic quality are reviewed.

Outcome of the review

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

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

In coming to this judgement the review team was mindful of the limited responsibility that the University has retained for assuring the quality of provision offered at its member institutions. The judgement therefore relates specifically to the responsibility of the University of Wales as an awarding body. However, there is no evidence to suggest that any of the awards achieved by students pursuing studies through the member institutions are in question.

The review team also considered that:

- confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and of the academic standards of its awards offered in collaboration with partners and administered by the University's Validation Unit.

Since the review QAA has been provided with information that indicates that appropriate action has been taken by the University in response to the findings of this report. As a result the review was signed off in October 2006.

Features of good practice

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

- the establishment of the moderators' conference to assist in supporting the work of the Validation Unit;

- the deployment of the moderator with an administrator from the Validation Unit to ensure that moderator visits are thorough and complete; and

- the work that the University is undertaking in support of Welsh medium teaching through the activities of the Welsh Medium Teaching Development Unit.

Recommendations for action

The review team also recommends that the University of Wales should consider further action in a number of areas to ensure that the academic quality and standards of the awards it offers are maintained. The team considers that it is essential that the University:

- establishes and implements a formal policy, and associated procedures, to safeguard the academic standards of all the awards for which the University is responsible; and

- develops and implements a strategy to ensure the future security of University of Wales awards.

The review team also formed the view that the University of Wales is advised to:

- reinforce existing structures to achieve a more integrated approach to academic and administrative leadership for the federal activities of the University; and

- review and redefine the relationships between the committees of the University, their reporting and feedback routes, and to clarify their terms of reference and responsibilities.

The review team also recommends that it would be desirable for the University of Wales to:

- identify ways of ensuring that external reports on the member institutions, and responses to those reports, contribute effectively to the safeguarding of awards for which the University is responsible;

- develop a more coherent approach towards the University's role in the enhancement of the quality of provision that leads to its awards; and

- continue to reflect on and address the recommendations made in the Wright Report.

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 which the Agency has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The review found that the University was generally making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure to inform its framework for the management of quality and standards.

Main report

Main report

1   An institutional review of the University of Wales (the University) was undertaken from 24 to 28 May 2004. The purpose of the review was to provide public information that the University is providing higher education awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and appropriate academic standard.

2   The review was carried out using a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). For institutions in Wales it replaces the previous process of continuation audit, undertaken by the Agency 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 the Agency on behalf of HEFCW as part of HEFCW's statutory responsibility for assessing the quality of education that it funds.

3   The review checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of its academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of programmes of study leading to those awards; and for publishing reliable information. The scope of the review encompassed all of the University's provision and collaborative arrangements leading to its awards.

Section 1: Introduction: the University of Wales

The institution and its mission

4   The University was founded by Royal Charter in 1893, and is one of Wales' oldest national institutions. It is a federal university comprising eight member institutions (Aberystwyth; Bangor; Cardiff; the College of Medicine; Lampeter; Swansea; University of Wales, Newport and University of Wales Institute, Cardiff) each of which awards the University of Wales degree. Four other Welsh higher education institutions (HEIs) offer programmes of study leading to the award of the University Wales degree but are not member institutions. Of these, the North East Wales Institute of Higher Education (NEWI), Swansea Institute of Higher Education and Trinity College, Carmarthen, are formally linked to the University as Associated Institutions (AIs). The fourth, the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD), currently offers University awards

through its validated provision. The Registry of the University is located in Cardiff. Since this review the University of Wales College, Newport has changed its title to University of Wales, Newport.

5   In total, some 70,000 students are enrolled in the University schemes of study in the member and AIs in Wales, and a further 9,000 students are enrolled on validated schemes. In 2002-03, the University awarded some 15,000 initial degrees and 4,250 higher degrees across almost the full range of academic subjects.

6   The University is currently in the process of changing its structure. Cardiff and the College of Medicine are merging in August 2004 and, at the same time, Cardiff is seeking the formal title 'Cardiff University'. Under the present policy framework it is not possible for an institution that bears formal university title to be a part or a member of another university. Therefore, Cardiff is expected to leave the University of Wales in August 2004, but the merged institute will continue to use the University of Wales degree for schemes in medicine and dentistry and some related subjects. Provision has been made for the merged institution to become an Affiliated (linked) Institution from the date of secession. A number of institutions, in addition to Cardiff, already possess or are seeking degree-awarding powers of their own. At present, it is a criterion for membership of the University that any such powers must be held in abeyance while an institution is a member. The University is seeking to bring about a change in policy to enable an institution that bears the formal title 'university' to be a member or a constituent part of another university. Should it succeed in this regard, it would then be possible for institutions like Cardiff, and any other institution that was granted university title in future, to be members. These changes would require substantive changes in the ownership of awards and the assurance of academic standards by the University of Wales. All three AIs and the RWCMD have accepted the University's invitation to become member institutions. These institutions are currently termed constituent institutions (elect). They are all now in a transitional phase of membership which will last up to five years while they are reviewed by a panel.

7   A special feature of the University is its support for Welsh medium teaching through its University Board. In partnership with other HEIs, the Welsh Medium Teaching Development Unit coordinates provision throughout Wales.

8   The University's Mission Statement is:

'The University of Wales enjoys a distinctive identity as a federal university comprising eight member institutions whose academic activities it exists to support and for which it is the degree-awarding authority. The University also enjoys close links with other higher education institutions in Wales.

Collaboration, partnership and interdependence - tempered by recognition of the extent of the respective autonomy of the University and its members - is the essence of its Mission. The University's broad strategic aim is to help create the conditions whereby its member institutions, as well as its own central academic units and services, achieve their full potential and maintain national and international academic excellence. The University supports and adds value to the academic work of its members by:

● acting, as the degree-awarding body, to ensure the maintenance of the highest academic standards in respect of its qualifications and to preserve and protect their reputation and integrity;

● encouraging the development of academic collaboration between member institutions and the pursuit of new joint initiatives;

● providing centrally organised academic units and services;

● acting as a forum for the expression of the collective views of the institutions on the University's academic policy and strategy;

● delivering efficient, cost-effective and high-quality academic administrative services for its member institutions.

In Wales, the University is a major national institution. It is committed to helping to fulfil the educational and economic needs of Wales and to supporting its linguistic, cultural, and national heritage. Looking beyond its distinctive Welsh responsibilities, the University is also committed to its international role and to enhancing its standing across the UK and overseas'.

Collaborative provision

9   The Validation Board was established in 1974 to advise the Academic Board on all matters relating to the validation of degree and sub-degree schemes of study of the University. Its role is to establish and ensure the University's academic standing in HEIs within Wales and throughout the world. It oversees around 200 University of Wales awards in about 100 institutions to over 9,000 students. The University describes itself as at the forefront in the UK of collaborative developments. The mission of the

Validation Board is to 'establish validation links with centres of good standing on a national/international basis' and refers to the fact that it is the Board's duty 'to ensure that, in matters relating to validation and franchising, the University's academic standing and integrity is safeguarded at all times'.

Background information

10   The published information for this review included:

● the report of the previous quality audit of the University by the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) undertaken in 1993, report published in 1994;

● the Agency quality audit reports of validated programmes overseas: Portobello College, Republic of Ireland, March 1999, Know How Group of Colleges, Spain, November 2000.

11   The University provided the Agency with the following documents:

● the institutional self-evaluation document (SED);

● Strategic Plan 2002-03 - 2006-07;

● Annual Review;

● University Calendar;

● access to the University's intranet site, which included minutes from Academic Board, the Regulations and Special Cases Committee (RSCC), Committee on Academic Standards (CAS), Validation Board;

● the University's Publication Scheme;

● list of current validation and franchise arrangements;

● the Academic Framework;

● Statistics;

● Response to the HEQC audit report in 1994;

● Validation and Franchising Review Report: James Wright;

● Validation Quality Handbook;

● Validation Quality Handbook (Health Studies scheme);

● Franchising Handbook;

● recent Agency reports on overseas partnership links: Portobello College, Republic of Ireland and Know How Group of Colleges, Spain.

12   During the briefing and review visits, the review team was given ready access to the University's internal documents.

The review process

13   The Agency conducted a preliminary visit to the University in September 2003 to discuss operational aspects of the review. The Agency received the SED in March 2004.

14   The review team visited the University on 21 and 22 April 2004 for the purpose of exploring with the Senior Vice-Chancellor, senior members of staff and a student representative matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the SED 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.

15   The students of the University were invited, through the Organisation of Students, to submit a separate document expressing views on the student experience of the University, and identifying any matters of concern or commendation with respect to the quality of programmes and the standards of awards. They were also invited to give their views on the level of representation afforded to them and on the extent to which their views were taken into account.

16   At the beginning of the briefing visit, the Organisation of Students submitted to the Agency a students' written submission (SWS) prepared by the University of Wales Organisation of Students in cooperation with the National Union of Students in Wales.

17   The review visit took place from 24 May 2004 and involved further meetings with staff of the University. The review team was: Dr D Furneaux; Professor H Griffiths, Dr I C Smith, the reviewers, and Mr R A Platt, review secretary. The review was coordinated for the Agency by Mrs N J Channon, Head of Operations, Institutional Review, Reviews Group.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

18   The HEQC 1994 audit report raised two main issues concerning University of Wales degrees. One of the recommendations indicated that there was a need for an authoritative and definitive federal handbook, or its equivalent, outlining the respective powers and responsibilities of the federal structures and the colleges in respect of quality assurance. In response the University published in 1997 its Academic Framework which described how the University was responsible for the standards of its degrees whereas its institutions were responsible for assuring quality, although with variable involvement by the University according to the maturity of the institution. In its introduction to the Framework document the University recognised that the further devolution of responsibility described in the documents could on its own 'expose the University to the charge that its awards no longer have a collectively guaranteed and consistently applied standard', and went on to describe how the Academic Framework had been developed, in part, to overcome this challenge.

19   The 1994 audit report also asked how the Academic Board might seek to define and encourage a more strategic university-wide approach to maintaining and enhancing standards. Subsequently the University established a Committee on Academic Quality and Standards (CAQS) but replaced this in 2002 with a CAS with a remit for quality enhancement issues such as Agency initiatives and reports. The Academic Board also took on primary responsibility for standards at this time. The effectiveness of the Framework and the revised committee structure are considered later in this report.

20   A number of further recommendations made by the HEQC audit report included an enhancement of the appeals procedure for postgraduates; the rapid development of a coherent approach to modularisation; and an appropriate plan to enable the Registry to meet the new federal needs. The University, in response, made a series of amendments to the appeals procedure for postgraduates, including the introduction of timescales for processing appeals and revisions to reflect recent legislation; supported the adoption of modularity across a wide range of its schemes; regularly reviewed and updated relevant regulations including the Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) scheme and has recently aligned itself with the National Assembly's Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales. In order the meet the new federal needs, the University appointed a personnel and training officer, implemented an appraisal and personal development process, increased provision for training and retraining staff, and has stated its commitment to obtaining Investors in People. The HEQC report also made recommendations regarding aspects of the federal scrutiny of external examiners and procedures for the review of their reports. In response the University devolved these matters to the member institutions, through its Academic Framework, subject to Section C of the external examiners' report, for 'matters of interest or concern to the federal University'. In the case of the AIs, further scrutiny of appointments is required by the Registry and subject chairs, and copies of the full reports are

received centrally at the University Registry. Where an external examiner has identified matters of a federal nature, they have the option to complete a section of the report form and send this direct to the University, the Registry then summarises these for discussion. However, the main reports are handled and summarised according the procedures of the individual institutions. The HEQC audit report also made a number of suggestions concerning the oversight of validated courses and the support of their moderators. The University has responded by expanding the role of Validation Board, taking a clear role in monitoring and enhancing its provision and providing detailed handbooks and annual updates for moderators. The procedures for external examiners for validated programmes have been clarified. In addition, students at validated institutions are sent registration information defining the extent of involvement with the University.

21   In 2001-02 the University commissioned Sir David Williams to carry out a review of its 'Membership, Structures and Modus Operandi'. Sir David reported in 2002 (the Williams Report) and his conclusions, which reflected the 'one Nation, one University' vision, were adopted in their entirety by the University. The conclusions of the Williams Report were that the differentiation that existed between constituent institutions and university colleges should be ended as soon as practicable; that the University of Glamorgan be invited to join the Federal University; that the degree-awarding power should be regarded as essential for a meaningful role of the federal structure; that the University must continue to exercise a quality assurance function in support of its prime role as the degree-awarding authority; and that in due course the Vice-Chancellors' Board should assume the functions of Higher Education Wales. Recent and proposed membership changes have been in line with the recommendations, although the desire of Cardiff to secede from, and Glamorgan to stay outside of, the federal degree have posed challenges for the full implementation of the recommendations. The report found the 'commonality of academic standards across the federal University of Wales', which is recognised in the Academic Framework, is in the view of many people, something to be cherished, not least in underpinning a workable system of quality assurance throughout Wales.

22   In 2002-03, and in response to one of the recommendations in the Williams Report, the University commissioned an independent panel chaired by James Wright to carry out a review of its validation and franchising activities (the Wright Report). The 18 recommendations made in the Wright Report were also endorsed by the University. These included progressive withdrawal from programmes taught in languages other than English or Welsh and the need to appoint a specialist consultant where the University does not have precisely identical subject capacity of its own. Other recommendations were mainly operational including the need to produce a five-year rolling business plan.

23   The review team acknowledged that the University had responded over the past 10 years to many financial, political and circumstantial changes by active review and by seeking external advice. However, the team saw little evidence of responses to changes in the national academic framework for quality assurance in higher education. Following the implementation of the Academic Framework and the confidence given by the Williams Report, along with the positive reports by the Agency of its institutions, the University has maintained the policy of regulating only restricted aspects of academic standards while leaving institutions to assure and monitor quality procedures and enhancement.

Section 2: The review investigations: institutional processes

The effectiveness of the institution's framework for managing quality and standards

The University's statement in the SED

24   The SED of the University provided an explanation of how, as a Federal University, responsibility for the management and assurance of the quality of its programmes, and the academic standards of its awards, has been defined, delegated and determined with regard to the responsibilities held by the Federal University and those institutions which offer its awards. In providing this explanation the SED emphasised the 'critical' importance of the University Academic Framework and its overarching definitions of the roles and responsibilities of the Federal University and its member and validated institutions and AIs. The SED explained that the Academic Framework provides distinct definitions of quality assurance, academic standards and academic quality, and determines subsequent involvement of the University and awarding institutions. While the University and its member institutions both retain involvement in quality assurance, specific responsibility for academic quality within the Academic Framework is related to the 'educational process experienced by students' and quality of

programme matters are therefore primarily the responsibility of the institutions of the University.

25 The University adopts the following definitions of quality, standards, and quality assurance:

- 'quality: the level of excellence of the academic and related provision which an institution makes for its students (ie, the term quality relates to the education process experienced by students);

- standards: the nature and level of attainment associated with the award of a particular degree or other qualification (ie, the term standards related to intended and actual achievement as expressed in terms of different levels of award and, where applicable, in terms of different classifications within a particular award);

- quality assurance: the process by which quality and standards, as well as the administrative and other arrangements which underpin these, are assessed, maintained and enhanced (*inter alia*, through the sharing of good practice) and by which any unacceptable provision is speedily and effectively addressed'.

26 In the SED, the Federal University, as the degree awarding body, described how it retains its responsibility for academic standards as they 'relate to intended and actual achievement as expressed in terms of '…levels of award…and in terms of...classifications within a particular award'. The University also identified its responsibilities as 'protecting, maintaining and enhancing the standards of its academic awards', a responsibility it fulfils in partnership with its institutions. Within the University Academic Framework the Federal University has established a 'stepped' approach towards its procedures for assuring the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards that reflects the 'academic maturity' of the institutions which offer its awards. The University delegates a substantial 'range of functions' to full members and more mature institutions but continues to retain a more 'hands on' relationship with its AIs and closer control in respect of its validated provision. The SED indicated that the University also retains an involvement in quality assurance matters generally through 'its work in developing the associated institutions and its collaborative provision', through the work of its major committees, and through 'its role as a primary facilitator of good practice'.

27 In its SED the University stated that 'the University is confident that…the Academic Framework will continue to safeguard its national and international status on the basis that the

University, and the institutions that offer its awards, have a shared interest and a collective responsibility for ensuring that academic standards are upheld and that the reputation of those awards is maintained and enhanced'.

28 The SED provided a summary of the mechanisms, procedures and processes which the University cites as underpinning its capacity to monitor the assurance of the academic standards of its awards. These are contained in the Academic Framework agreement and associated documentation which forms the basis of the federated relationship with institutions. The mechanisms include:

- providing and maintaining a common regulatory framework for its awards which incorporates the University regulations, the required university standing orders, award criteria and associated procedural documents and guidance documents;

- the specification of minimum quality assurance procedures to be adopted by all institutions and the reviewing of institutional quality assurance documentation and external audit and assessment reports;

- reviewing the reports of, and interacting with, external examiners;

- involvement in taught scheme of study procedures and taking an active role in the approval of new schemes of study;

- providing an independent academic appeals procedure and setting guidelines for the handling of unfair practice;

- administering examination and graduation functions.

29 The SED outlined the role of external examiners, external consultants and advisers as they contribute to the assurance of academic standards in the member and validated institutions and AIs of the University. The SED stated that the University's relationship with external examiners provides a 'key element' in monitoring and guaranteeing standards. The University produces codes of practice for external examiners and has differentiated procedures for the receipt, discussion and actioning of matters raised by external examiners from its member institutions and AIs and from its validated provision. However, the University does not produce a handbook for academic staff which integrates quality assurance and enhancement agendas with the regulatory and procedural documentation that is currently contained in the Registry Staff Manual, and

in the view of the review team it would help academic staff if they could access all the information that they needed from one source. The Registry does, however, issue an annual despatch pack to moderators and external examiners and to institutions which deliver its validated provision. This contains supportive and regulatory documentation, University guidelines and related material.

30   In the context of the retained University of Wales responsibilities however, and those which are delegated to its member institutions, the SED outlined a number of interrelated elements which contribute to the manner in which it has oversight of the monitoring of its academic standards and quality assurance management. These include:

- the Federal University of Wales committee structure;

- University of Wales working parties and groups;

- Conducting internal and external University of Wales reviews and through the monitoring of review mechanisms;

- University of Wales Registry staff and those staff located in institutions that have academic standards and quality assurance responsibilities;

- University of Wales Subject Chairs and standing committees; and

- supportive documentation which is produced in a variety of formats and sequences of production and distribution, and which includes web site and email correspondence.

The review team's view

31   The SED identified responsibility for the approval of new research degrees, taught schemes of study and scheme developments, which are to be delivered in member institutions, as being devolved to the respective member institution together with responsibility for periodic reviews and academic quality matters. This forms a part of the University Academic Framework agreement. The University retains a role in managing the academic standards of AIs, member and collaborative partners and, in addition, has maintained a role in quality assurance in all its institutions together with a more detailed control of the monitoring of academic quality for validated provision. Much emphasis was placed on the Academic Framework throughout the SED, although the review team noted that the main thrust of the Framework for member institutions is limited to a reminder that institutions are subject to national arrangements for quality audit and assessment and that they should provide the

University with documentation of their procedures and of reports by national bodies.

32   In the light of the University's identified responsibilities described in the SED and incorporated in the Academic Framework the review team considered the University committee structures, supporting Registry functions, communications processes, and management procedures, policies and strategies, to be central to an understanding of how academic standards and quality assurance matters are effectively managed in the University. The SED provided a helpful diagram of the University committee structure. This was supplemented by additional details indicating lines of communication and reporting responsibilities for University committees and other groups.

33   The University has a Council, a University Court and an Academic Board. A Vice-Chancellors Board reports to University Council as does Academic Board. The main subcommittees with responsibility for academic standards and quality assurance matters which report to Academic Board are the CAS, Validation Board, the RSCC, Appeal Boards and University Standing Committees.

34   The SED identified Academic Board as being 'the supreme academic authority' and responsible for 'all academic matters which fall within the purview of the University'. The constitution and terms of reference of Academic Board have been recently revised to include 'direct responsibility for the oversight of all matters relating to academic standards', and the review team was informed that a significant change had occurred in the Board's conduct of business, focus of discussion and interest in academic standards and quality assurance matters shifting from a 'rubber stamp' procedural emphasis to a more involved focus on academic standards and quality assurance business.

35   Academic Board's academic standards agenda has included oversight and discussion of reports from University Appeals Boards, consideration of individual Agency institutional reports, student complaints investigation and the refinement of handling of plagiarism procedures. The SED also indicated that the Board is currently considering matters in respect of classification schemes, equivalency of marking and grading of academic performance, and marking conventions within the University.

36   The review team noted that Academic Board is also considering the means by which it may be able to develop 'its role in academic standards' through a more 'structured' involvement in 'institutions' periodic reviews' and that it is implementing a

sampling exercise for the consideration of full external examiners reports in comparison to its present procedures. The University also intends to develop its quality assurance involvement with its institutions through the receipt of Agency draft SEDs and consideration of Agency institutional review reports dealing with the University institutions.

37   CAS has also been recently established and provided with revised terms of reference which replace those of the previous CAQS. CAS has the role of assisting 'the Academic Board in the maintenance and enhancement of academic standards'. Its terms of reference include advising the Academic Board on matters relating to the academic standards of the University's awards, drafting notes of guidance and codes of practice as directed by the Academic Board, monitoring Agency initiatives in conjunction with Academic Board and assisting the Academic Board in the oversight of institutions internal quality assurance procedures. CAS has a particular academic standards and quality assurance role in its receipt and monitoring of commentaries on external examiners' reports and in receiving summaries of matters raised by external examiners which relate to the Federal University issues.

38   The quality assurance and academic standards focus of CAS has also included consideration of procedures for new schemes of study and the review of schemes of study; oversight of institutions quality assurance handbooks; procedures for the monitoring of student feedback; and consideration of teaching and learning development initiatives. The Committee has also recently reflected on the involvement of the University in quality enhancement strategies and inter-institutional academic development. This has included training for research degree supervisors, consideration of Equivalency and Benchmarking strategies and papers from the University standing committee on Life Long Learning.

39   The review team recognised the change in emphasis which was being evidenced in the work both of the Academic Board and CAS, and the evolutionary manner in which the CAS was beginning to incorporate integrated academic quality and standards matters into its remit. However, the team was unable to identify any overarching strategy that provided a framework for the identification of initiatives, each of which appeared to be generated individually. The team came to the view that while these initiatives provided a means through which the University could begin to coordinate its role more effectively, it was unclear as to the direction of the University in respect of its future position in respect of quality and standards. For example, the intention of the

Academic Board to be more involved with periodic reviews in institutions could be seen as being a helpful move in the direction of clearer oversight by the University in the way institutions deliver the Academic Framework. But, the initiative does not appear to be part of any overall view regarding what minimum level of involvement of the University in the work of the institutions should be, and the team was unable to identify how this development would relate to the Academic Framework, or how it reflects the University's stated aim of supporting institutions by safeguarding standards 'with the minimum necessary imposition or prescription from the centre', or how it relates to the 'collective responsibility' of the institutions. The team considered that the work of both committees needed to be more robustly placed in an annual academic planning cycle.

40   The University Regulations and Special Cases Committee considers academic standards matters within two distinct areas. The Committee controls the regulations frameworks for all schemes of study, including setting threshold achievement standards, and deals with special cases which arise outside of the regulatory framework. It also has a role in the control of the assessments and examinations processes and in the consideration of relevant sections of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*), published by the Agency (see below, paragraph 66).

41   Collaborative provision, categorised by the University as either validated or franchised, is a significant element of the University's portfolio. It is managed through a Validation Board which exists to advise the University through Academic Board on all matters relating to validation and franchising of schemes of study leading to a University of Wales award. This Board has three subcommittees, the Executive Committee, the Committee for Health Studies and the Planning Advisory Group. Operational and administrative support for the Validation Board's activities is provided by the central Validation Unit based in the University Registry (see below, paragraph 93).

42   As a result of the central nature of the Validation Board and Unit and the federal nature of the University, there is no formal link between the partners providing validated programmes and departments within the University offering similar provision. The contact with the University is through a University moderator. Moderators are appointed members of University staff, normally from a

department offering similar programmes. Their tasks include liaison, monitoring procedures at examination boards, providing academic advice, providing a quality assurance role and submitting an annual report to the University. For franchised provision there are direct links between the franchiser (member or AIs) and the partner, as much of the responsibility for this activity is delegated to the institution concerned.

43   In the review team's view the arrangements for managing validated and franchised activities through the Validation Board and its subcommittees are appropriate, while noting that validated collaborative partners do not benefit from formal links with a department in the University and the developmental opportunities this would provide.

44   The University has a number of additional subcommittees, standing committees and working groups that contribute to its intended framework for the management of quality assurance and standards. These include the University Working Group on Modularisation which has contributed to the development of the University Modularisation and CAT schemes, and the revision of the University's accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) procedures, and the University Superintendents of Examinations Group which reports to the RSCC on the effective management of examinations and assessments. The University Superintendents of Examinations Group has considered, with other committees, specific aspects of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*. The University has also recently formed an Academic Registries Interface Group which acts as an informal forum for the evaluation of administrative issues.

45   There are 20 University Subject Chairs (USC) who are able to convene *ad hoc* meetings as required. There are three Subject Standing Committees, in Education, Lifelong Learning, and Professions Allied to Medicine, which are chaired by the appropriate USC. USCs have the responsibility for the approval of supervisors and external examiners in AIs and executive approval responsibilities for scheme proposals from AIs following the completion of internal procedures involving the University subject representatives. The review team noted, however, that USCs are not collectively involved in the development of academic standards or quality assurance development strategies as a coherent management group and appear to have no collective opportunity to contribute to the strategic academic focus of quality assurance issues at the discipline level across

the University. This appeared to the team to be a missed opportunity for the sharing of good practice and the development of a University wide approach to validated provision.

46   The Standing Committees for Life Long Learning, for Education, and for Professions Allied to Medicine are responsible for liaison between the University and the professional agencies responsible for academic standards and professional accreditation in these areas. In response to national strategies for the development of Welsh Medium Teaching the University has also expanded the work of the University Board for Welsh Medium Teaching, and this has taken a proactive role in professional leadership activities in the sector. Its quality assurance and standards agenda has been congruently taken forward within the formation of the Welsh Medium Teaching Development Unit and subsequent quality enhancement initiatives in the coordination of national strategy implementation, Life Long Learning, sector management, and national quality assurance and standards agency requirements.

47   The manner in which the management structure worked and the roles of the committees, together with their perspective of their related functions, were discussed by the review team with University of Wales staff and with representatives from the member and validated institutions and AIs. The team was made aware of the complementary roles and responsibilities which existed between the University and its institutions, and of the concern which the University had for not duplicating the 'internal quality assurance mechanisms of the member and Associated institutions' or external bodies.

48   The review team was told about the current strategic discussion on the need for 'a radical change in the nature of the relationship between the university and the institutions' and that the starting point for this 'should be the definition of the roles and functions that the University should in future carry out'. The team was also made aware of a number of initiatives that would enable the University to look at developing its role in the monitoring of academic standards. These included University participation in a 'more structured' way in institutions periodic reviews and in the sampling of full external examiners' reports for its member institutions where, at present, the University only receives voluntary reports from externals on matters 'of federal interest or concern'. While recognising that the University was now developing on 'a blank sheet of paper' its definitions of roles, relationships and functions between the University and its constituencies, an overarching strategy for

managing the roles related to academic standards and quality assurance will be required to ensure that they are more coherent and robust in their definition and execution, and to enable individual initiatives to be embedded in a strategic plan.

49   In considering the way in which the University operational structures worked it was evident that the University Registry and central support services provided advice on regulatory, procedural and other matters, including collaborative provision queries and academic appeals queries, 'whenever required'. The University Registry produces quinnquennial strategic documents and annually updates regulations, procedural guidelines and the Academic Framework agreement document. The Registry also produces an annual despatch letter and support package for external examiners, moderators and validated institutions and there is regular email correspondence which is supplemented by web site contents on administrative and regulatory matters.

50   A picture emerged of a predominantly administrative organisation which spends considerable time and commitment in offering guidance, updating procedures and regulations, and responding to enquires which arose from member and validated institutions and AIs. The review team was not able, however, to discern a coherent and consistently integrated and applied policy regarding the implementation, monitoring and confirmation of all operational and procedural requirements contained in communications from the University to its institutions. While some monitoring occurred it was apparent that member institutions were expected to take note of expectations which were placed upon them and act accordingly.

51   The University does not produce an annual manual which identifies the strategic and operational requirements for maintaining academic standards and quality assurance. The review team, recognising the extensive agenda undertaken by the committees of the University, was not able to identify a clear and regular strategic analysis of the work undertaken by the University or the consequent identification of, and reflection upon, required policy definition and refinement.

52   The review team found that while committee membership of Academic Board and the Vice-Chancellors Board were appropriate for their remit, there had been considerable previous limitations in the membership of certain major subcommittees of Academic Board. The recent expansion of the membership of the CAS to include academic members from each institution would provide one

means through which the University could integrate broader academic contributions to the monitoring of standards and quality assurance matters across the Federal University. The team also noted the singular and committed student contribution to the work of the University committees; however, it formed the view that while student representation and commentary on their experience was evident at the individual institutional levels, the University needed to reflect upon the future assurance of secure and adequate student representation at the University committee levels in order to obtain adequate reflection of the student experience within the University.

53   The review team concluded that the Federal University had been subject to substantial external review exercises and that the committee structures and their terms of reference and remit had as a result been actively revised. Additionally, successive reviews made in response to external requirements and changing contexts, required a more integrated approach to academic and administrative leadership for the federal activities of the University which focused upon academic standards and quality assurance activities. While the Academic Framework agreement and the Federal University structures were commensurate with the dual nature of the Federated University there was now a need to establish a more coherent policy for the strategic management of the 'roles and functions' within the University for the future direction and security of its academic standards and its quality assurance responsibilities.

Enhancement of quality and standards

54   The SED did not identify any specific enhancement agenda but discussed the University's role in the enhancement of quality and standards by describing a variety of initiatives which are currently being developed. A number of intended activities and focuses for future action were identified. The SED provided a general context for its enhancement considerations which is based upon the 'shared interest in and a collective responsibility for ensuring that academic standards are upheld and that the reputation of …[the University of Wales]…awards is maintained and enhanced'. The SED did not, however, include a comprehensive formulation of specific enhancement targets with action plans and dates for implementation and subsequent review within a strategic management agenda. While the SED indicated expected improvements they were not always clearly related to their direct contribution to the enhancement of quality, quality assurance or academic standards.

55   Initiatives that the review team identified following discussion with staff included:

- pilot exercises involving the reconsideration of the manner in which periodic review is conducted, including the involvement of University subject representatives, and the intended development of a federal University enhancement led approach to the University's involvement in periodic review;

- the introduction of interim Verification and Appeals procedures for validated schemes of study to maintain consistency of procedures related to academic standards;

- annual updating of Unfair Practice Procedures by the RSCC to ensure compliance with European legislation and other requirements;

- reconsideration of the principles and system of internal reviews and their contribution to procedures and enhancement practices with a subsequent evaluation of the implementation of the outcomes;

- an ongoing consideration and utilisation of risk management analysis as it relates to enhancement opportunities and academic standards.

56   The review team also noted the management and enhancement actions which are being implemented within the University Board for Welsh Medium Teaching and taken forward through the Welsh Medium Teaching Development Unit whose initiatives include:

- establishing a network of subject panels related to aspects of the subjects and the disciplines in order to plan the expansion and enhancement of Welsh Medium provision on a strategic basis;

- creating a database of Welsh language examiners (jointly with the CAS);

- launching an e-journal and web site dedicated to the publication of academic journals and supportive of Welsh Medium provision;

- setting objectives for the formulation of the staff development strategy, including scholarship and fellowship schemes aimed at enhancing Welsh Medium teaching provision and standards.

57   The SED identified specific Validation Board enhancement targets that are located within a three-year programme for consideration and implementation. They include:

- further consideration of the validation and franchising review report;

- the introduction of formal board of studies meetings for validated schemes of study in order to enhance the reporting structure to Validation Board;

- the introduction of student accessible on-line learning resource facilities;

- the refinement of guidelines for distance-learning schemes of study and the consideration of the requirements for the provision of key skills;

- the continuation of subject workshops for validated centres on enhancement matters associated with their provision;

- the introduction of a new student records system with a consequent evaluation of the appropriate utilisation of statistical information and its contribution to the management of standards and quality assurance matters;

- the introduction of more comprehensive assessment practice guidelines.

58   The review team also noted the increased and evolving enhancement ethos which was reflected in the documentation and in discussion with staff of the University and the institutions. It became clear that the University Standing Committees responsible for Education, Professions Allied to Medicine and Life Long Learning were adopting a strategic and operational view towards enhancement within their terms of reference. This proactive consideration of enhancement opportunities has the potential to provide a positive impact on the role of the University standing committees and their potential for contribution to the enhancement agenda within the University as a whole. The work of the CAS and its involvement in enhancement discussions related to Life Long Learning, Assessment and Equivalencing, Benchmarking and the enhancement of Teaching and Learning - through the all Wales Teaching and Learning Forum - offered similar indications of the manner in which enhancement support opportunities were being evolved within the University.

59   It became clear in the discussions with staff that the redefinition of the terms of reference of the Academic Board, the establishment of a Vice-Chancellors Board, which was now reconsidering roles, relationships and functions within the University, and the developing remit of the CAS were encouraging a more enhancement-led focus within the committee structures of the University. The review team formed the view that these changes of emphasis, however, were fragmentary and required to be made more explicit and placed within a strategic management framework within

which all examples of enhancement opportunity and development could be promulgated and regularly reviewed within the corporate focus and planning cycle of the University.

Internal approval, monitoring and review

60   Approval of programmes of study is devolved to institutions. The University requires that internal validation events must include a subject representative approved by the USC who must receive the report of the validation. For AIs the Subject Chair must be satisfied that the course approval procedure has been correctly followed. The University guidelines for reports include a listing of full panel membership with their designation. The SED noted that the subject representative helps ensure consistency of standards within the University and augments the emphasis on input external to the Federal University which is required at each institution.

61   The SED stated that annual monitoring and periodic review of programmes relates mostly to the institutions and not the University. The Academic Framework makes no specific requirements for these procedures other than that they should exist, and makes no specific requirements for external participation in the processes. The Academic Board has started to consider ways in which the University could be involved in periodic reviews and has recently undertaken a pilot scheme at one institution where a University Subject Representative (USR) acts to give cross-institutional insight at the institution's periodic reviews. The review team was encouraged to see evidence that the University could develop strategies to assist it in monitoring the quality and standards of its awards. However, the team did not see any evidence that this initiative was part of an overall strategy for the development of a central overview and was not provided with examples of the how or specifically when this pilot scheme would be evaluated.

62   The University stated that it 'has matched its procedures against the relevant sections of the [Agency's] Code and is confident of adherence where relevant'. CAS is required to have oversight of institutions' internal quality assurance procedures. The Academic Framework requires institutions to supply the University with a copy of its academic quality assurance procedures and a list of schemes of study leading to qualifications of the University. The review team heard that the University relied for assurance of quality on the overview of these quality handbooks which is undertaken by the Registry and on receipt of the validation reports. However, the Academic Framework does not prescribe what

should be in the handbooks. While the oversight of handbooks and validation reports by the Registry do provide some assurance, the team considered that the procedures did not provide mechanisms for a robust knowledge of existing procedures within institutions, or for the University's own approach to development of quality procedures.

External participation in internal approval, monitoring and review processes

63   The SED stated that external advisers are required for programme approval at each institution. However, neither the Framework nor the Registry Handbook specify the procedures for monitoring and reviewing programmes. These responsibilities are completely devolved to the individual institutions. As a consequence there is no stated requirement for external involvement in periodic review, although the CAQS has compared the procedures in place at each institution for the consideration of new schemes of study. The review team formed the view that as these measures of externality are considered to be fundamental to quality assurance, the University should seek an overview of monitoring and review in the institutions to ensure that this key aspect of quality assurance is implemented across the University. This would then allow it to express confidence that broad practice in this area is in line with the Agency precepts.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

64   The Academic Framework requires institutions to provide the Senior Vice-Chancellor with quality audit and assessment reports by national bodies, together with a response by the institution. However, there has, until recently, been no requirement for these to be considered by the Academic Board or elsewhere so as to provide a clear central lead in the assurance of quality. The review team saw, for example, that Academic Board had noted two Agency engagement reports but did not make any comment on the Agency conclusion. There would have been a number of engagement reports on member institutions available at this time, but the team saw no evidence of an attempt to draw together all the outcomes of Agency engagement reports to identify general themes. The team was not able to find any evidence of systematic analysis by the University of national reviews of its institutions.

65   Given that the Academic Framework states that 'It is not intended that the University of Wales, in carrying out its legitimate role as the guarantor of

standards, should duplicate the activities of the Agency, of the Funding Council or of any other national quality agency', it seems fundamental to the review team that the University should undertake a comprehensive consideration of the reports these agencies produce for their institutions in support of the assurance of the quality of University of Wales degrees. The SED explained, and the team was told, that the University intends to develop its involvement in Agency review of institutions by asking for draft SEDs to be submitted to the Academic Board. Following the publication by the Agency of the subsequent reports, the Board intends to focus its attention to evaluating the reports to derive the maximum benefit for all of its institutions from the conclusions of each review. While the review team considers that this increasing involvement in influencing submissions to external agencies, and monitoring the responses, as a positive development, it is the view of the team that it is essential that the University establishes a comprehensive and active appraisal of all the lessons to be learnt from external reviews.

Assessment practice and procedures

66   The RSCC oversees the University's examinations and assessments procedures. The University Registry provide the administrative support within the Federal University. The RSCC sets and maintains the regulatory frameworks for all schemes of study and stipulates minimum thresholds for awards. It also considers special cases as they arise in assessments and APEL matriculation to postgraduate schemes. The University Superintendents of Examinations group produces an annual review on the examinations cycle which is reported to RSCC. One superintendent of examinations is appointed by each institution and they are responsible for the local oversight of the conduct of examinations matters. RSSC and the Superintendents of Examinations group have also a responsibility for reviewing University standing orders, monitoring compliance with University procedures and regulations within institutions, and for the consideration and implementation of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*.

67   The University Registry is responsible for the annual distribution of regulations and guidance documents to all University institutions. The University has two sets of regulations, enabling (which apply to member institutions), and more prescriptive (which apply to AIs and validated provision). Both sets of regulations contain examinations and assessment requirements.

University guidelines are also regularly issued directly to institutions and revisions of regulations, guidelines and supporting documentation emanating from RSCC and/or Superintendents of Examinations, are distributed via email or hard copy. Enhancement guidelines issued through this procedure have included those for the supervision of masters dissertations, for handling *viva voce* examinations and special circumstances cases, for research degree examinations and research examiners, for the conduct of double-marking and for assuring compliance with disability legislation. It was indicated to the review team that while guidelines and regulations identify procedural requirements they are not intended to restrict the methodology through which they are applied and may be enhanced by the institutions. All assessment results are required to be confirmed and endorsed by an external examiner at an examination board. The University has also established a web accessed database of bilingual examiners in conformance with the *Guidelines for higher education institutions in Wales on effective practice in examining and assessing in a language other than the language of tuition,* published by the Agency.

68   The Academic Framework agreement and the consequent concern for 'complementarity' in the delegation of responsibilities between the University and its members does, however, raise future policy and strategic management issues for the Federal University in the identification of academic standards responsibilities. The *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*, has been considered by RSCC and CAS following discussion by the Superintendents of Examinations Group. The University has decided that this section of the *Code* 'mostly relates to functions carried out at University of Wales institutions rather than the Federal University'. Of particular note is the precept which identifies the requirement for consistent implementation and publication of clear criteria for grading and marking of assessments. In examining the work undertaken by the CAS and the RSCC on matters associated with benchmarking, anonymous and double-marking practices, script retention, equivalencing, and in pilot exercise 'cross institutional moderation', the review team noted that there were several sets of classification and marking criteria in operation in individual institutions of the University. In discussion, the team was informed that the development of an equivalencing strategy would be 'a long and hard job'. In the view of the team support for the development of a significant policy and management initiative was required if the University

was to be assured in the future that consistent and comparable use of standards criteria were being applied in all institutions.

69   The review team noted that while consideration of the comparative and underlying practices of assessment was beginning to take place, for example, the CAS consideration of equivalencing models and criteria referenced assessment procedures across the University, emphasis remained focused principally upon detailed regulatory, procedural and formal examinations requirements. In carrying out its academic standards and quality assurance functions the University does not yet extend its role to considering the implications of varied assessment methodologies, the principles underlying assessment and their relationship to teaching and learning across the University and the consequent impact which these would have on the University of Wales student experience. The team concluded that the University should adopt a more participatory and strategic approach to the balance of its consideration of these matters as they relate to the assurance of academic standards and quality.

External examiners and their reports

70   The SED stated that external examiners reports are a key and essential element in monitoring and guaranteeing standards and in identifying enhancement matters, and that these are critical to ensuring that the University awards are comparable with standards within higher education in the UK. The University provides its external examiners with two codes of practice for taught and research schemes of study which are matched within University procedures to the *Code of practice* requirements. Induction programmes, involving the University's Registry staff, are required to be provided by institutions for their external examiners, and a full induction pack of support documentation including University regulations, guidelines documentation and a copy of the external examiners report form are provided. The University codes of practice aim to ensure impartiality in the role of the external examiner by normally precluding the selection of external examiners being made from the University's institutions.

71   Within its Academic Framework agreement the University has distinguished two approaches to the handling of the administrative responsibilities for external examiners, for the receipt and processing of their reports, and for the detailed management of the role. For external examiners appointed to member institutions, the University has largely delegated responsibility for the nomination and appointment of external examiners and all associated administration to the institutions. The University retains an oversight of the nominations. Lists of appointments are required to be passed to the Senior Vice-Chancellor annually and the Academic Board retains a final query and approval role. For AIs and validated institutions the University controls the appointments procedures through required approval by its subject chairs. Nominations are also scrutinised by the Validation Board Executive Committee before final ratification by the Academic Board.

72   University procedures for dealing with external examiners reports in member institutions require external examiners to provide, via a pro forma, direct comment to the member institution on specific matters which are related to the scheme being examined, and additional comment on assessments, comparability of standards, benchmarking, programme specifications, compliance with national qualifications frameworks and codes of practice, and other aspects of examinations issues which are relevant to the scheme of study being examined. The Academic Framework requires member institutions to consider matters that are communicated to them by external examiners and to provide the University 'with any issues considered to be of interest or concern to the University'.

73   Within the pro forma reporting procedure external examiners are also invited to comment directly to both the institution and the University Registry on matters that are of a federal concern. CAS monitors comments and responses are conveyed to the external examiner. Where action is required the University notifies the institution and requests an indication of action taken. Generic matters raised in this process are referred through CAS' annual considerations and may be included in action planning or incorporated in specific outcomes for CAS or institutions to address. Examples of CAS consideration of matters which have been identified within this process include the formulation of procedures to deal with the handling of plagiarism, refinement of procedures for post graduate progression, and agreement on principles and procedures for modular assessment. CAS also receives summary responses from member institutions on matters of federal interest which are raised by the external examiners. The process for the consideration of external examiner reports on validated provision is different. The Validation Board has the key responsibility for receiving all the reports and providing an overview to Academic Board via the CAS which considers them. (see below, paragraph 113)

74   The review team noted that in the procedures for handling external examiners reports from both collaborative provision and member institutions there were opportunities for both positive and negative comment to be provided for consideration by the institutions and the University. However, only 10 per cent of external examiners in member institutions took the opportunity to comment on federal matters. CAS gives equal prominence to the consideration of good practice and matters to be addressed in this annual process. As a result of the complex timing of committee meetings some institutions found it difficult to keep to the submission schedule for CAS' consideration of commentaries on external examiners reports. The team also saw evidence of some confusion among external examiners about the information that should go to the University, and the information which should go to the institution.

75   The review team formed the view that the differentiated and delegated systems for the management of external examiners reports while accommodating the roles of the University the AIs and member and validated provision, were somewhat complex. Present processes and management requirements did not ensure that external examiners comments upon academic standards and quality assurance matters in member institutions and AIs or matters which related to federal thematic issues were sufficiently available to the University standing committees for fully comparable assurance purposes and regular strategic review.

76   While the present procedure offers external examiners the opportunity to comment voluntarily on federal matters it does not provide the University with a sufficiently critical overview or direct knowledge of academic standards as they relate to the strategic role of the University. The proposal for the sampling of full external examiners reports in institutions for which the University is 'currently only in receipt of the matters of Federal interest', was seen by the review team as a positive means of considering external examiners reports by exception. The initiation of development workshops on the role of external examining and the annual moderators workshop was also recognised as good practice contributing to the University's quality assurance and standards role. However, it was unclear to the team how such changes could be aligned with the Academic Framework which gives full responsibility for external examiners to member institutions. Nevertheless, the team considered that a more integrated and coherently inclusive policy is required for the University to be able to have

sufficient oversight of standards issues raised by external examiners; to be in a position to ensure the consistency of managing the process; and to be able to review more rigorously external examiners' confirmation of the comparability of standards across all aspects of the University provision.

Student admission and the use made of progression and completion statistics

77   The University requires its institutions to provide basic numeric information on students admitted and qualifications achieved. This raw data was supplied to the review team in tabular format without any analysis. Detailed student data, according to the SED, is held by the institutions and not the Federal University. The team heard that a comparison table of undergraduate degree classes by the different institutions is produced for consideration and that two groups, the Academic Registries' Interface Group and Equivalencing Working Group, were looking at what the University should be doing with data. Furthermore a new student data system was to be installed soon: a new member of Registry staff had been appointed and work was currently in progress to decide what data should be held by the University.

78   The review team considered that the previous lack of active consideration of data for student admissions and progression reflected the University's view that it was the institutions only who were concerned with quality management, not the University. The team considered that the University should move rapidly towards its stated intention to move to a position of knowledge and active management of student data to provide an overview of student achievement across the University and to enable it to fulfil its remit for the oversight of standards across the University.

External reference points

79   The Academic Framework of the University requires each institution to establish their own procedures to ensure quality and to be individually subject to national arrangements for quality audit. However, Academic Board requires CAS to promote and initiate discussions on the enhancement of standards across the Federal University; draft Notes of Guidance and Codes of Practice as directed by the Board; and monitor the Agency initiatives in conjunction with the Board. In support of these aims the SED noted how the University has responded to external reference points in teaching quality. While in general, responsibility is placed with the institutions, specific requirements are that (i) specifications for new teaching programmes include

reference to relevant benchmarks, (ii) criteria for categories of awards match FHEQ descriptors and (iii) a move towards implementing the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales*. In addition, the SED noted how it has responded to the *Code of practice* where these relate to specific functions of the Federal University such as external examining, academic appeals and examination practices.

80   The review team heard at the review that there had in fact been a major change in the role of Academic Board over the last two years, with most of its business now relating to quality and standards within the national agenda. The *Code of practice* has been considered by both CAS and Registry staff resulting in proposals to Academic Board. The team heard that senior staff now recognised that, in responding to the *Code*, academic quality and standards were inseparable despite the formal position of the University that it was only responsible for standards.

81   The review team saw that there had been major changes in the approach of Academic Board and CAS to the *Code of practice*. However, because of the formal structure of the University and the Academic Framework the response has been to focus only on the issues for which it already has a formal responsibility, such as award categories. Perhaps because the University has limited formal mechanisms for receiving information about its teaching programmes, there was a restricted coverage of quality issues. The team considered that if the University wishes to maintain ownership of its degrees and other awards then it is essential that it develops a strategy for managing quality and standards that is in line with the national framework.

Student representation

82   The SED described how the constitution of Academic Board includes student representation and that the provision extends to its subcommittees. RSCC has provision for two student members, while CAS and the Validation Board each have provision for one student member. The review team noted that each of these committees had one student member attending and that it was the same student in each case. This student also sits on Council but not Appeals. The team was told that obtaining student representation was complicated by the fact that National Union of Students (NUS) Wales covers institutions in addition to those of the University and that student representation was achieved through the commitment of a single member of the University of Wales Organisation of Students in 2003-04.

83   In the SWS, the students clarified that the establishment of the Organisation of Students was an important principle but was not too effective. In addition the SWS reported that in a focus group of students and NUS officers from other member institutions, none were aware of the role of the University and did not feel part of a Federal University. The SWS noted that the University is expecting to undergo substantial change and thus considered it important that the University should encourage student involvement in this process and ensure that outcomes are well communicated to students. From the evidence available to the review team, it appeared that, in general, students consider that NUS Wales represents their views and that there was minimal knowledge by students of the Organisation of Students. However, the University looks to the Organisation of Students to provide the representation on its committees. This clearly poses a challenge to the University to ensure adequate representation on its committees and, as it responds to the changing environment, the University will wish to consider how to achieve more effective student representation.

Feedback

84   The University does not collate information from the first destination surveys of its graduates. The SED was silent on gathering feedback from students, graduates and employers except in the case of Welsh medium provision where the review team heard that the unit's mission to seek HE provision matched the needs of prospective students, communities and employers in Wales. The University does have an annual gathering of NUS presidents from its institutions along with senior members of staff from the University, but there did not appear to be any more formal mechanisms for achieving student feedback or input at the federal level.

Student complaints and appeals

85   The University's procedures for appeals and complaints are clearly distinguished. The SED described how complaints about provision of academic service, are dealt with in institutions with a possibility of a complaint being referred to the Senior Vice-Chancellor and Academic Board at the University, a process that has only been taken up once in recent years. An appeal to review an academic decision is normally also dealt with at the institution but the University retains a formal responsibility as the appellate body for all candidates who have completed their period of study for all schemes and programmes of study. About 150 cases a year are

brought to the University. These are limited to those who either have completed their studies or to appeals by students accused of unfair practices.

86   The SED described how its involvement in the 'hearing of appeals cases and setting guidelines for resolving cases of alleged unfair practice' are one of the elements that the University relies on to assure the standards of its awards. The SED explained that Academic Board has begun to receive reports directly from the Appeal Board with the aim of improving procedures. Academic Board has conducted a complaints investigation and has also instituted a Panel of Enquiry into allegations of plagiarism. Both students and staff reported to the review team that the University appeals process added a welcome neutral and external consideration which was distinct from the home institution of the student and which therefore provided an additional safeguard for students. However, students and student advisers told the team that the process was complex to understand and use, and that the published literature explaining the process was also difficult to understand.

87   The review team was concerned that the delineation of the University's responsibility for the appeals processes between institutions, which had responsibility for hearing appeals against progression board decisions, and the University which heard appeals arising from awards boards and from unfair practice hearings, detracted from its stated value as a method of assuring the University about the standards of its degrees. Furthermore, the team heard that the literature sent to students about appeals was not helpful in supporting this stated aim.

Staff appraisal and reward and staff development

88   Teaching staff are employed by the institutions and not by the University. However, the University sets the procedures for the appointment of senior academic staff (readers and professors) and requires a University representative on the appointment panel. Formal approval of Academic Board is required for the appointment of staff outside the constituent institutions where permitted. The SED did not comment on this process or its value in assuring standards or the quality of the student learning experience. The University maintains a formal role but does not appear to appreciate the opportunity to encourage wider aspects of quality enhancement of academic staff through the promotion procedures. The SED gave no federal viewpoint on the means by which the quality of teaching staff is assured. In particular the generic

issues arising from the Institutes for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education did not appear to have been developed.

89   In contrast, the review team noted the positive approach of the Standing Committee on Lifelong Learning in looking for quality enhancement and increasing effective partnership with industry. Likewise the University Board for Welsh Medium Teaching offers professional leadership in its field and the University funds a teaching development officer to support this role. CAS had been proactive in looking for the exchange of good practice on teaching and learning initiatives in the institutions. In March 2002 the University supported an all-day seminar on quality issues. Finally important areas for supporting staff development are provided by the promotion and financial support by the University of a number of University bodies to promote inter-institutional collaboration in specific subject areas such as the University of Wales Council for Geography and the University of Wales Institute for Classics and Ancient History.

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

90   Within the member institution there are only a few collaborations involving the delivery of programmes by distributed and distance methods. These all come under the management of the Validation Board and Unit and are governed by the processes contained in the Validation Handbook. In recognition of the particular challenges presented by such arrangements the University has supplemented its general instructions with a specific section in the Validation Handbook on the Validation of Distance mode schemes. Taking all these mechanisms together with the procedure for the initial vetting of new centres, it appeared to the team to provide an overview which was generally compatible with the expectations of the *Guidelines on the quality assurance of distance learning* published by the Agency.

Academic guidance and supervision of students

91   Arrangements for academic support of students are made by the institutions and are not regulated by the Federal University. An exception is for research supervisors at AIs where approval of the University is required. The review team saw that there was some feedback to the University through the appeals procedure, where adequacy of research supervision can be questioned, and the Regulations and Special Cases Committee which sets a wide variety of rulings such as the 'Guidelines on Close Personal

Relationships'. The team heard that one consequence of appeals was that research supervisors are now required to maintain documentary evidence of meetings with students. The team considered that these processes reflect on the responsibilities of academic staff rather than providing the University with assurance about the support of students.

Personal support

92   Personal support for students is provided by the institutions. The University, through its Framework and committee structure, takes no direct interest in student support and guidance.

Collaborative arrangements

93   All collaborative provision is overseen by the Validation Board which is given administrative support by the Validation Unit. The University categorises its collaborative arrangements as either validated or franchised provision and employs the broad definitions of validation and franchising contained in the current *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision*. The Validation Board has primary responsibility for initiating, establishing, and maintaining all validated provision, and for taking an overview role with respect to franchising activities by the member institutions. The University has validation arrangements with some 20 organisations in the UK and approximately 55 overseas links. Programmes range from certificate/diploma level through various first degrees and taught masters to research degrees (MPhil, PhD).

94   Franchise activity is concentrated in the University of Wales, Newport and NEWI and is predominantly PGCE/CertEd in UK and provision of programmes in business-related subjects overseas. The review team was made aware of two programmes that had been approved for delivery through partners in the UK which were being delivered by the UK partners in institutions overseas. The team learned that recently procedures had been reviewed, and that although delivery overseas was continuing, there was now a direct relationship via a formal agreement between the overseas institution and the University. The University will need to remain vigilant to ensure that it is aware of all centres offering its programmes.

95   The SED stated that the Validation Board's work has been matched carefully to the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision* and the University is satisfied that its procedures are comparable with those stated. The review team is broadly in agreement with this assessment, except where specific issues are identified below.

Responsibility for quality and standards

Franchised courses

96   In respect of franchised courses the University takes an overview which is based on its role as the ultimate guarantor of standards wherever awards are offered in its name. The responsibility for monitoring the academic integrity of franchised awards is delegated to the franchiser. A Franchising Handbook is published by the University which contains an appropriate level of detail for franchisers and their partners. In line with the Franchising Handbook, the review team noted that Validation Board representatives were present on visiting panels for both initial approval and periodic review of franchised provision, and that an annual monitoring report and external examiners reports were scrutinised at the Validation Board Executive Committee. The team concluded that the University had a sufficient and effective oversight of franchised provision.

Validated courses

97   The SED stated that the Validation Board has primary responsibility for the University's validated provision which entails operating an all-embracing system which covers all aspects of a validated collaboration. The mission statement for the Validation Board and Unit includes statements on safeguarding the University's academic standing and on focusing on quality assurance and appraisal mechanisms. In contrast with provision offered in member institutions, it was clear that the University considered itself responsible for the quality and standards of validated provision. Two handbooks are published for validated programmes, one for Health Studies schemes and one for the other validation provision.

The role of the moderator

98   The SED described how a 'moderator is appointed, for each validated scheme of study from an appropriate School or Department'. It goes on to explain that the moderator 'performs a vital role in terms of staff development initiatives together with focusing on course development and on ensuring that appropriate attention is given to the implementation of key regulatory matters at each validated centre'. It was clear to the review team that the role is central to the University's ability to monitor the consistency and robustness of the quality assurance processes and of the academic standards of awards delivered through partner institutions. The University runs an annual moderators' conference which is preceded by a training session for new moderators which all new appointees are invited to attend. For existing provision new moderators will normally overlap

with the outgoing post holder so that programme specific issues can be passed on.

99　The review team viewed the documentation for a typical annual conference and concluded that it was a supportive and developmental process which made a significant contribution to quality enhancement and that the attendance was good. Moderators are required to provide an annual report on the partner institution and the team heard that moderators make regular visits to the partner institutions. For visits to institutions, moderators are accompanied by a member of staff from the Validation Unit wherever possible. In the view of the team this was good practice which had the potential both to ensure that such visits were conducted thoroughly but also to develop a good liaison between institutions and the Validation Unit. However, there was also evidence that while some moderators used the template provided for their annual report as a basis for their visit programme, others were less formal. In a meeting with moderators, the team heard that some indicated that a separate meeting with students was mandatory but in at least one case it was evident that such a meeting had not been part of the visit. In the team's view the quality and consistency of the moderators' contribution to the maintenance of quality and standards would be enhanced by production of more detailed operational guidance particularly in respect of matters to be covered during visits to ensure consistency amongst those fulfilling the role, particularly when a member of the Validation Unit is not available to accompany the moderator.

100 The review team heard that while administratively the moderators are assisted and supported well by the Validation Unit, there did not appear to be an active overview of moderators activities and role in the area of quality and standards and, apart from commentary in the quinquennial review, (see below, paragraph 110) no regular review of moderators' performance. The University may wish to consider how the role of the moderator could be reviewed, developed and reported on to ensure it is meeting the requirements of the University.

The Validation and Franchising Review Report (The Wright Report)

101 The SED described the recent review of the University's validation and franchising activities resulting in the Wright Report. The Report was provided to the review team and proved most useful in putting the collaborative activities of the University in context. The Report was published in August 2003 and the team was able to use the recommendations of the Report to recognise the work already done by the University. Several of the

recommendations were particularly relevant to the team and have been identified below.

102 *Recommendation 1 - That the Validation Board should include a Vice-Chancellor*. In discussion the review team was told this it was not possible to meet this recommendation at present due to retirements and the imminent replacement of the Senior Vice-Chancellor, although the issue would be revisited. While accepting the constraints on the University in meeting this recommendation, the team concluded that the Validation Board would benefit significantly from an input at strategic level and that this could be provided by the presence of a member of the Vice-Chancellors' Board.

103 *Recommendation 8 - That the University should no longer validate or agree to franchise new programmes where the language of instruction is neither English or Welsh, or where there is no analogous provision within the University*. In respect of the recommendation on language, in discussion the review team learned that the University was waiting for the revised *Code of practice*, *Section 2: Collaborative provision* before making final decisions. The team would encourage the University to keep this recommendation under consideration.

104 *Recommendation 9 - That where the University validates analogous provision and does not have a precisely identical subject capacity of its own it should appoint a course consultant from the discipline to act in tandem with the moderator*. When reflecting on the 'analogous provision' issues raised by the Wright Report the review team concluded that there was insufficient clarity between the definitions of 'not analogous' and 'not precisely identical' to be sure that there was a shared understanding of the differences which could mean that it would be possible to validate programmes for which there is no subject expertise within the University. The team was able to consider one partnership where there was no analogous provision in the University. In the view of the team in such cases the robust academic input and support which would compare to that provided for other validated programmes, would be best served by the appointment of a permanent expert course consultant to supply the academic input normally provided by the moderator. However, in discussion, the team learned that in response to the Wright Report recommendation the University intended to appoint a course consultant one year before programmes were due a quinquennial review. The team considered that this was not a suitable response to the recommendation and would not provide the University with the assurance necessary. In considering this further, the University will also

wish to provide further guidance on the definitions of 'not analogous' and 'not identical' so that the validation requirements are clear.

105 *Recommendation 14 - Moderators should serve initially for five years with the possibility of re-appointment for a single period of two years*. In its SED the University stated that the 'period of office for each Moderator associated with a particular validated course is now limited to a maximum of seven years'. In the view of the review team this statement is not in the spirit of the recommendation and that in the interests of avoiding over-familiarity and promoting new ideas and staff development, the University may wish to consider making five years the normal maximum, with exceptionally a two-year extension.

Key features of procedures

a. Memoranda of agreement

106 Both Validation Handbooks contain a sample agreement document, the Franchise Handbook does not. In considering the sample agreement alongside the relevant section of the *Code of practice* the review team noted the initial term of the agreement was for three years. Thereafter the agreement continues 'year on year' until terminated. The team learned that there was no formal annual review of agreements with partners to signal continued approval and that the clause was formulated on legal advice. The team concluded that this open-ended arrangement was not fully compatible with the *Code* which suggests including consideration of the duration of the agreement and review arrangements. Although programmes are subject to quinquennial review, currently there does not seem to be a formal process for reviewing the continuing suitability of the partner institution, or for continuing annual approval. The University will wish to consider how partnerships are formally reviewed and whether it would be appropriate to identify a formal end point for agreements. In addition, the University could usefully provide a sample agreement for franchised programmes in the Franchise Handbook, to ensure its requirements are clear.

b. Approval, Monitoring and Review

Approval

107 Procedures for the initial vetting of new centres, and the validation of new programmes are laid out in the Validation Handbooks. The Handbooks require Visiting Panels to include a chairperson from the Validation Board, appropriate subject experts from within the University and a subject expert external to the University. The review team considered this membership to be appropriate as it includes genuine externality and the ability to benchmark against similar University provision. The examples of validated provision approvals studied by the team showed that the proper procedures for initial approval were followed, although the team noted that external academic input for one was taken as a written report. In this example there was no analogous provision within the University and so there was a heavy reliance on the external experts. Particularly in these circumstances, the opportunity for the panel to be involved in face-to-face discussion on the programme's academic rigour would add significantly to the process.

108 A post validation follow-up visit is undertaken by the moderator and/or a member of the Validation Unit and a formal report to the Executive Committee is produced which the review team considered to be good practice. Subsequent approval for changes to programmes is dependent on the magnitude of change. Where it involves more than 30 per cent of the programme a formal review by a panel of assessors is initiated. If the change involves less than 30 per cent there are two approval methods. For non-health related programmes, authority to approve changes rests with the moderator and the external examiners. For Health Studies courses this same process is included in the Handbook but, from the evidence available to the team, approval may also be delegated to the Joint Board of Study for the programme. This Board consists of four representatives of the University including the moderator and the external examiners, and three representatives from the validated centre. In both examples the changes are presented to the Executive Committee as part of the annual report on the provision. Although unlikely, both processes could mean a programme's content could change with only the external examiner's judgement on subject specific change. This point also has implications for the periodic review processes (see below, paragraph 110). In view of these matters the University might wish to consider the level at which approval for amendment to programmes is made, the potential for the involvement of independent internal subject experts in the process, and the clarification of the current arrangements for Health Studies programmes.

Monitoring

109 Guidance on annual reports on validated provision is provided in Validation Handbooks. There are three reports which are written by the moderator(s), the external examiners, and the partner institution. All three reports are considered

together at the Executive Committee where two members independent of the moderator's department scrutinise the reports and report to the Committee. The scrutineers then ensure comments and recommendations are acted upon using a formal annual response form. This process is managed by the Validation Unit. The review team was able to see examples of this process in action and, from the evidence available to it, concluded it was robust, impartial and effective.

Quinquennial and 3-year review

110 Normally programmes are formally reviewed every five years. With Health Studies programmes an additional interim review takes place after the first three years of the operation of the programme. In both cases the process involves a review panel comprising a member of the Validation Board as chair person, the external examiners, and an additional subject expert from a UK University outwith the University of Wales. The panel reports formally to the Validation Board via the Executive Committee. The moderator is not a member of the panel but will have formal meetings with the panel, as one of the reasons for holding such meetings is to assess and report on the moderator's performance. The review team viewed samples of the reports and associated papers and concluded that as a process these reviews were also robust and effective. There is, however, a concern about the constitution of the panels for these events. The chair is unlikely to be a subject expert and, as noted above, the external examiners will probably have been involved in the approval and possibly the development of content and assessment changes. This may pose difficulties for the external examiners to take an objective and impartial view of programme developments and this may put considerable pressure on the external subject expert. For validated programmes where there is no analogous provision, the issue is perhaps more acute as the programme will have been developed without the benefit of a University of Wales subject perspective from the moderator. The University may wish to consider reviewing the composition of its panels for three year and quinquennial reviews so as to ensure the maximum benefit is obtained from impartial external expertise, and an internal University of Wales subject-based perspective.

Lines of communication and administrative support

111 The Validation Unit takes a central role in promoting good communications between all parties involved in collaborative activities. It also normally provides staff support for moderators' visits

to partners and also undertakes a staff development role in procedural and regulatory matters as required. This team approach to visits appeared to the review team to be good practice. Overall the team concluded that communications between all concerned with collaborative provision and the administrative support were both very sound and reflected well on the work of the Validation Unit. Induction of external examiners for validated institutions is required to be provided by a University moderator and a member of the University Registry Validation Unit staff.

The appointment of external examiners for collaborative provision

112 For validated programmes institutions are asked for external examiner nominations and curricula vitaes (CVs) which are returned to the Validation Unit. The moderator is then asked to comment as are two members of the Executive Committee with allocated responsibility for the institution concerned. All comments are then sent to the Validation Board Chair for final approval. If the Executive Committee Chair and Validation Board members involved are not subject experts this could mean that the only subject-based assessment is made by the moderator. For non-analagous provision it is possible that no subject based assessment would be available. Noting that for AIs the Subject Chair views CVs and comments on suitability, the University may wish to consider routing nominations for collaborative provision in the same way which would provide an opportunity to assess and regulate the consistency of appointments across all programmes delivered in a particular subject area in partner institutions and AIs.

113 External examiners for validated provision are required to submit an annual report to the Validation Unit which includes actions required of the institution concerned. Copies of reports are circulated to the institution for response, to the appropriate University moderator and to University of Wales staff including members of the Validation Board Executive Committee or the full Validation Board who may comment on issues required to be addressed by the University moderator for the provision, by the external examiner or by the institution. Institutions are required to respond to standards and quality assurance issues which are raised within this process. Summaries of all external examiners and moderators recommendations are sent to collaborative institutions as a part of an annual response and review process for these institutions. Validation Board has available all annual documentation for annual and quinquennial reviews. It is the intention that enhancement of this process

will include the consideration of external examiners and moderators reports at joint boards of study which will be convened annually at each institution. An overview report of all issues raised by external examiners, prepared by the Validation Unit is presented to CAS, the Validation Board Executive Committee and the annual moderators meeting. Time series analysis of the issues raised by external examiners and institutional responses are included in this reporting cycle. The University accepts that although the process is detailed there are potential gaps in its systematic consistency of application particularly as a means of ensuring that institutions act on requirements which emerge within the process.

Validation of research degrees

114 The review team was interested to see that the University extends its validation processes to the validation of institutions for research degrees, both MPhil and PhD. In discussions it was not clear to the team how this validation was undertaken, what checks were made on the quality of the research proposals and what the University's role was in the supervision and examination of candidates. No information is provided in the Validation Handbooks, the only guidance the team could find was a paper entitled 'Criteria for applications to register and supervise candidates for the degrees of MPhil and PhD of the University of Wales'. The University may wish to consider making the documentation of processes in this area more comprehensive and provide further information about the ways in which the standards of the awards are safeguarded and made more transparent.

Student experience of published information

115 The responsibility for providing information for students rests with the institutions. In compiling the SWS a focus group made up of Student Union representatives was convened. The SWS reported that none of the representatives could recall any literature regarding the University of Wales or its role. A major feature, for students, of the University is its appeals procedure and information on this is provided by both student handbook and web site. However, the review team heard from several sources that this literature is neither easy to understand nor memorable to students. The SWS concluded that these issues should be addressed, hopefully by the cooperation of the University with NUS Wales. The University will wish to ensure that students studying for a University degree are provided with pertinent and clear information about the University and, in particular, the appeals process.

Reliability of published information

116 The SED reported that the Federal University does not make Higher Education Statistics Agency data returns as all its students are registered at the institutions who thus hold the data and make their own returns. However, the review team were told that plans were underway to share data with its institutions and that two groups are looking at what should be done with the data. At this stage, the team considered that the University did not have, nor had intended to have, a comprehensive knowledge of its student performance and related data. Introduction of new data transfer mechanisms between institutions and the University, and of functional management of this data, is identified by the review team as an area to be addressed urgently.

Findings

Findings

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

117 The University of Wales has its own Academic Framework document which provides the academic basis for the federal relationship between the University and those member and collaborative institutions and AIs which offer University awards. The Academic Framework agreement separates responsibility for academic standards, quality within academic provision, and quality assurance matters generally between the Federal University and its institutions. The specific delegation of responsibilities depends upon the academic maturity of the institution, and whether the institution is a full member of the University, or whether they are AIs or collaborative institutions providing validated or franchised schemes. For its AIs and collaborative provision the University retains a scaled and stepped degree of oversight or direct control on matters of academic quality, academic standards and quality assurance.

118 The University has devolved to its full member institutions a specific responsibility for academic quality matters, while both the University and the member institutions retain an involvement in quality assurance. The University also retains a shared responsibility for the protection, maintenance and enhancement of academic standards.

119 Recent changes to the external environment however are causing the University to reconsider the nature and definitions of the roles and functions that the University should in the future carry out. The University Vice-Chancellors Board and the Academic Board have both recently debated these issues and the review team were made aware of the 'blank sheet of paper' that was emerging upon which the future strategic and operational roles of the University and its institutions were being debated.

120 Recent revisions to the terms of reference of the Academic Board and of some of Sub Committees and their respective Working Groups, for example the CAS and the Standing Committee for Life Long Learning: indicated an initial reconsideration and realignment of University priorities particularly in the manner in which academic standards and associated quality assurance matters were beginning to be discussed at the University level. This was commented upon and seen as an emerging and positive move both by University staff and the review team. The team was told specifically of the shift in emphasis within the Academic Board from it being a 'rubber stamp' body primarily concerned with regulatory and procedural matters, to one in which there was now a much more discursive involvement with matters which were of importance to the University as a whole.

121 The review team concluded that in the context of these changing responsibilities for quality and standards, the implications of the Academic Framework Agreement, the complexity of the mechanisms for the management of standards and quality assurance within the University, and the need to support and maintain an integrated strategic relationship between the University and its institutions, all required reinforcement of the University's academic and administrative policies and development of its management strategies.

122 The University has within its Academic Framework agreement reviewed the *Code of practice* published by the Agency and has established a differentiated responsibility for addressing aspects of the *Code* between the University and its institutions. The University has defined its interest in those aspects of the *Code* which are related to academic standards matters and to quality assurance generally. Those sections of the *Code* which relate to academic quality matters within the provision offered by member institutions and AIs have been deemed to be 'mainly' devolved to the institutional level with no 'additional input from the federal University of Wales' being required. There are emerging indications, however, of the University developing its consideration of both the academic standards and quality management aspects of the *Code* and a recognition of the importance for the University of finding appropriate means of managing these converging considerations within a strategic framework which continues to acknowledge the future respective roles of the University and its institutions. In order to ensure that all aspects and precepts of the *Code* are effectively reviewed and confirmed at the University level there is the need for the development of a significant strategic management and integrated policy initiative.

123 Academic standards and quality assurance matters for member and collaborative partners and AIs are managed through the University committee structures and this involves the Academic Board, the Vice-Chancellors Board, CAS, the Validation board, the RSCC, Appeals Board, and a variety of subcommittees and standing committees, and working groups. The University Registry staff support these mechanisms. University Registry staff liaise with the institutions and are always available for advice and support. Registry staff are specifically responsible for the management of the common regulatory

framework for the awards, the specification of minimum quality assurance procedures in institutions, reviewing and liaising with external examiners on matters associated with their reports and other administration, involvement in the procedures associated with approval of schemes of study, providing independent appeals procedures and associated administration, and supporting graduation and examinations procedures and administration.

124 Changes in the terms of reference of the University committees and of the membership and the focus of the business of its subcommittees indicates that the University in responding to external circumstances and is becoming more inclusive in its reflection of academic comment on matters associated with academic standards and quality assurance. The review team noted particularly the precedent of the expansion of the membership of the CAS to include academic membership from each of the institutions in the University. Conversely there were examples of a limited involvement from key sectors of opinion within the University, These included the student body and the USCs. At the time of the review, the University had no method for ensuring that it received input from students other than through a single, enthusiastic, representative of the Organisation of Students. The USCs have no coherent and regular collective opportunity to review academic standards or quality assurance policies or their own potential contributions.

125 While the redefining of the roles and terms of reference of the committees in the University would contribute to future strategic discussions, the review team formed the view that the subsequent management of the complex elements which made up the University needed to be critically reflected upon in order that a more coherent and integrated leadership of administrative and academic policies could be established.

126 The SED stated that the University relationship with its external examiners provides a 'key element' in guaranteeing the academic standards of its awards. The University provides codes of practice for its external examiners and for those external examiners in its AIs and collaborative provision it also provides an annual despatch pack. An annual pack is also sent to the University's collaborative partner, institutions and to the University moderator who acts in the liaison role and as academic contact for the external for the particular institution. The despatch pack includes regulatory and supportive documentation. The University also produces the Registry Manual which largely relates to regulations. The University does not produce a separate annual academic quality

and standards publication which integrates all associated regulations, procedural documentation, quality assurance policies, enhancement policies and required references to codes of practice. There is extensive use of email and other communications procedures to inform external examiners and institutions of changes to regulations and other administrative requirements.

127 All newly appointed external examiners are invited to attend an induction event and where possible a member of staff from the University Registry attends and speaks at these events. In addition, for collaborative provision there are University moderator training days.

128 The University has largely delegated responsibility for the nomination and appointment of external examiners and all associated administration in member institutions to the institution itself. For collaborative institutions and AIs the University controls appointment procedures through its subject chairs and through scrutiny and approval through its Validation Board.

129 External examiners reports are seen as an important element in ensuring that University of Wales 'awards are comparable' to standards within the UK. The University has two differentiated procedures for the receipt and handling of external examiners reports. Annual reports for all validated provision are submitted directly to the University. The Validation Board reviews the reports, stipulates its requirements, and receives reports on action taken. A summary of resultant outcomes and actions taken in response to reports is presented to the CAS, to the external examiner and to the respective institution.

130 For member institutions external examiners are provided with a pro forma in which comment is provided to the institution on specific matters related to the scheme being examined, and on other matters related to the FHEQ, comparability of standards programme specifications, assessments, and codes of practice. Institutions consider these reports and provide a response to external examiners. The Framework also requires member institutions and AIs to consider matters that are communicated to them by external examiners. Examiners may provide the University 'with any issues considered to be of interest or concern to the University'.

131 The pro forma also offers external examiners the opportunity to comment directly to the University on matters which are of a federal University nature. Recent response rates to this opportunity indicate 10 per cent of the external examiners chose to make a return. The review team formed the view that while these differentiated systems accommodated the

roles of the Federal University, the member institutions, AIs and collaborative provision they were somewhat complex and did not ensure that external examiners comments upon academic standards and quality assurance matters in member institutions or matters which related to federal thematic issues were sufficiently available to University standing committees in order that fully comparable discussion could occur. The team noted that the University had already recognised that its oversight was insufficient by taking the positive move to involve itself in more detailed sampling of external examiners reports on a pilot basis with a view to its inclusion as a permanent enhancement. However, the team would emphasise the importance of the University adopting a more coherent, extended and inclusive policy in order to sufficiently oversee standards issues raised by external examiners, and to be able to ensure the compatibility of managing the process. It would also allow the University to review more rigorously comparability of standards in all aspects of its provision.

132 The Federal University of Wales does not have a direct responsibility for registering students or for monitoring student progression. Member and other institutions hold completion data and statistics and draw performance indicators from them. The University does produce a data set which was made available to the review team. The University accepts that its present statistical information, and the relationship to its own specification of the purposes for which it requires such data, is at an early stage in its development. The team was informed that the development of a policy for the utilisation of statistics and their appropriate application is in the process of being established. The University is addressing this issue with the appointment of a new member of Registry staff. The team welcomed this development as another opportunity for the University to develop greater knowledge of the awards offered in its name.

Assuring quality of programmes

133 The historical role of the University has been to act as a central registry for its institutions. As such, it has provided a regulatory framework codified as the Registry Departmental Manual. This provides a comprehensive set of enabling regulations for University of Wales taught and research programmes. It sets out, for credit-based programmes, the number of credits (student notional hours/10) required at each level of study. It also details procedures for examining its programmes, calculating award classifications, the handling of assessed work, and the operation of

exam boards. Combined, these requirements act to ensure the necessary background for assuring the programmes governed by the University. In addition, the University specifies minimum procedures for the approval of programmes by the institutions. All new programmes require the involvement of a USR who must report to the University that all its regulations have been met. The guideline programme proposal includes reference to subject benchmark statements, published by the Agency, arrangements for course monitoring and for student evaluation of the programme. The University does not specify membership of the approval panel, such as the use of external advisers, but does require the institution concerned to report back the membership.

134 The University does not maintain oversight of the regular monitoring and evaluation of existing programmes, devolving this to the institutions, except in that the Registry receives the quality handbooks of the institutions for general adherence to current Agency guidelines. However, the Academic Board has begun to consider ways that it might have a more effective oversight and has piloted schemes to monitor periodic reviews by its institutions and to involve the USR in giving a cross-institutional view during periodic review. The review team welcomes this development as a further recognition of the University's commitment to oversee the review of its awards.

135 The SED made clear that the use of external advisers in programme approval is a matter for the individual institutions but that the University is confident that all its institutions make such requirements. The SED did not clarify if this applies to all internal quality procedures. The review team recommends that the University makes both these requirements a matter of University policy.

136 The University stated in its SED that it is confident of adherence to the *Code of practice,* published by the Agency, through the dual system of institutional and federal responsibility. The University continues to reflect on the processes as seen though the progressive changes in membership and activities of Academic Board and the Committee on Academic Standards. The SED noted that Academic Board seeks to develop federal systems that complement but not replicate those of the institutions.

137 The review team acknowledges the special position of the University in wishing to encourage freedom in its institutions to develop their own quality assurance procedures and in wishing to ensure the common standards of the University awards for which it is responsible. To a large extent the dual process acts to enhance the quality of the

programmes, with the federal Registry acting as a valuable resource to supplement the local skills. However the team saw both dangers and missed opportunities in their approach. The limited evaluation by the University of its programmes meant both that it could not be confident in assuring their quality and that it was less able to provide a leading role, rather than its historical permissive role, in the management of quality. The team felt it essential that this dilemma was revisited by the University. If it is to be responsible for quality assurance of its programmes, a much deeper evaluation of the outcomes of its programmes is required.

138 The review team found it difficult to see how the University balanced its collective institutional responsibility for standards and quality with some of the federal initiatives currently being developed. Without a strategic plan and academic leadership there is potential for the University to generate activities without a clear view of the consequences, or without any certainty that they will continue in the long term. As it stands, the University has neither sufficient oversight of standards maintenance activities, nor sufficient mechanisms to ensure the collective responsibility for quality and standards.

Supporting learning

139 The University, as it has no direct funding for teaching, defines its institutions as being the responsible bodies for supporting learning and staff development. It sees its role in assuring these processes by the feedback it receives from student appeals and from the federal issues reported by external examiners. The review team noted that these processes did not give a representative view of student issues and furthermore that student involvement in the decision-making processes of the University was very limited. The team recommends a radical re-evaluation by the University of its procedures for ensuring knowledge of, and responsiveness to, the student experience. However, the team also noted how in some cases the University had made strong contributions to supporting learning. Inter-institutional collaboration and staff development had been promoted though an increasing number of subject-specific University bodies such as the Council for Geography. The University Board for Welsh Medium Teaching and the Standing Committee on Lifelong Learning both provided leadership and learning enhancement. The team encourages the University to seek further mechanisms to broaden its achievements in cross-institutional staff development.

National reference points

140 The University expressed, in its SED, confidence in its adherence to the *Code of practice*, to subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ published by the Agency. However, the review team saw that to a large extent this confidence is based on the University's oversight of the quality handbooks in the institutions. The approach of the University was indeed in terms of adherence to the national reference points rather than of enhancement through the consideration of these statements. The team acknowledges the progressive change in Academic Board towards a policy of enhancement but would wish to see this process formalised. The team also recommends that there is process in place for the progressive incorporation of national reference points to established programmes as well as new programmes.

Reliability of information

141 Quantitative data on student awards provided to the Review panel was limited, was only partly summarised and had not been analysed in the SED, to draw out issues of importance in the management of its programmes. The review team heard that there was an intention to improve the availability of data through the introduction of a new computer system and that two committees were considering ways in which relevant information could be derived from this. The team welcomed this necessary development.

142 The SWS reported that students had very little knowledge of the University of Wales and its involvement in their programme and its awards. Students seen during the review confirmed this opinion to the review team. Information about appeal processes were particularly noted for lack of clarity. The team recommends that the University reviews its procedures for providing its students with information about the role of the University.

Intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards

143 The SED prepared for the review contained no single fully integrated discussion of coordinated strategies for the enhancement of the University's overarching role in quality assurance and standards matters. The SED did provide a general context for the University role in enhancement which is based upon a 'shared interest in and a collective responsibility for ensuring that academic standards are upheld and that the reputation of…[the University of Wales]…awards is maintained and enhanced'.

144 The SED did however contain a variety of intentions for enhancement of which some were more precisely defined than others. The Validation Board for example has determined a number of targets for consideration and implementation within a three-year programme. These include, continued consideration of the Validation and Review Report (the Wright Report); introducing formal boards of study within validated provision to enhance the reporting structure; introducing student access to on line learning facilities; refining guidelines for distance learning schemes and provision of key skills; continuing subject based and enhancement focussed workshops for validated centres; introducing new student record systems and more comprehensive assessment practice guidelines.

145 The SED detailed enhancement objectives that are being actioned through the Welsh Medium Teaching Development Unit which included the establishment of subject advisory panels, advisory networks and a database of welsh language examiners. Strategic intentions also included the determination of objectives for a staff development strategy and the incorporation of scholarship and fellowship schemes aimed at enhancing the teaching provision within the sector.

146 In addition, the SED included a number of emerging initiatives which offer a partial basis for the development of an enhancement led policy. These include the introduction of pilot exercises involving reconsideration of the conduct of periodic review and a reconsideration of the principles and system of internal reviews. Both initiatives were considered by the review team to be contributions to a more enhancement focused approach. There are also indications of a more proactive identification of the enhancement role of the University in the recent agenda and work of the University standing committees and working parties/groups.

147 The review team concluded that while these initiatives demonstrated emerging positive practice and were to be encouraged and supported, they were not yet incorporated into a comprehensive and explicit strategic management focus within which all enhancement planning opportunities, good practice models, and their contribution to the corporate objectives of the University could be regularly identified, reviewed and promulgated for the benefit of the University as a whole. The team consequently formed the view that opportunities to reflect upon positive practice and examples of integrated enhancement strategies were not being fully realised within the Federal University. The SED also indicated intentions for action and expected improvement.

These were not however always clearly related to their direct contribution to the enhancement of quality, quality assurance or academic standards outcomes.

Utility of the SED

148 The SED described the many changes that have occurred in the federal nature of the University and how this has required a climate of continued change in the structure and responsibilities of the University committees. Furthermore a wide variety of possible future changes are acknowledged and their implications discussed. The SED had little to offer on the crucial question of the implicit responsibility, though ownership of the awards of the University, for quality assurance and for enhancement. The tenor of the SED was of checking compliance rather than of enhancement. The review team saw the University's role as primarily regulatory rather than seeking for ways to enhance the student experience. The SED offered as evidence of feedback for the assurance of quality (i) the involvement with external examiners, (ii) the appeals procedure and (iii) representation by students on its committees. All these appeared to the team to be less effective than had been proposed. Information received from external examiners was selective to what the external examiners or institutions considered to be federal issues. The federal appeals procedures allowed for only a prescribed range relative to appeals heard by the institutions. The entire student representation to the University consisted of a single individual representing an organisation that was almost unknown to the student body.

149 The SED was not informative on the current management structure of the University, in particular failing to describe the Vice-Chancellors Board which, while it does not have a formal position in the overall structure, in the view of the review team, does play a key role in the management of the University. The team considered that while the SED accurately reflected the state of the University at the time of writing and the state of change within the University as it reacts to external influences and internal initiatives, it did not provide a clear balance between academic and administrative leadership and whether there was a role for a full-time academic leading enhancement issues.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the quality and standards of awards through collaborative provision

150 The University has a significant amount of collaborative provision, designated either as franchised or validated. Franchised provision is

relatively small and is arranged by member and AIs directly with partners, the University involves itself in certain key activities for example initial approval, periodic review; and the receipt and analysis of annual reports on the programmes and external examiner reports. These arrangements provide the University with a sound overview of franchise activities leading to awards in its name.

151 Validated provision is arranged and managed by the Federal University through a University level committee, the Validation Board. This Board is provided with administrative support by a Validation Unit located in the University Registry. Handbooks are published giving detailed guidance for the approval and operation of validated programmes and the University has a set of processes for initial approval and the annual and periodic review of programmes. A key factor in the University's ability to manage validated provision effectively is the use of University moderators, who are staff appointed from the same subject area within the University. Their role is complex, involving monitoring, advising, safeguarding University procedures, processes, and standards, and periodic reporting. In the view of the review team this arrangement is broadly effective.

152 The review team saw evidence that overall the validation operation is working effectively, the main report identifies several issues the University may wish to consider in order to further strengthen its current procedures. There are also a number of issues that the University will wish to consider in respect of is validated provision as it continues to respond to the recommendations of the Wright Report, in particular it is facing challenges in the safeguarding of standards for provision where there is no programme in the same subject within the University.

Features of good practice

153 Of the features of good practice noted in the course of the review, the review team identified the following in particular:

i   the work that the University is undertaking in support of Welsh medium teaching through the activities of the Welsh Medium Teaching Development Unit (paragraphs 46, 56, 89, 139, 145);

ii   the establishment of the moderators' conference to assist in supporting the work of the Validation Unit (paragraphs 98; 99); and

iii the deployment of the moderator with an administrator from the Validation Unit to ensure that moderator visits are thorough and complete (paragraph 99).

Recommendations for action

154 The review team considers it essential that the University of Wales:

i   establishes and implements a formal policy, and associated procedures, to safeguard the academic standards of all the awards for which it is responsible (paragraphs 39, 50, 53, 62, 63, 75, 78, 87); and

ii   develops and implements a strategy to ensure the future security of the University awards (paragraphs 48, 61, 68, 69, 76, 81).

155 The University of Wales is further advised to:

iii review and redefine the relationships between the committees of the University, their reporting and feedback routes, and their terms of reference and responsibilities (paragraphs 39, 53, 74); and

iv   reinforce existing structures to achieve a more integrated approach to academic and administrative leadership for the federal activities of the University (paragraphs 52, 53, 83, 88).

The review would suggest that the following would also be desirable:

v   to develop a more coherent approach towards the University's role in the enhancement of the quality of provision that leads to its awards (paragraphs 59, 147);

vi   to identify ways of ensuring that external reports on the member institutions, and responses to those reports, contribute effectively to the safeguarding of awards for which the University is responsible (paragraphs 64, 65); and

vii to continue to reflect on and address the recommendations made in the 'Wright Report' (paragraphs 102 to 105).

Appendix

The University of Wales' response to the institutional review report

The University is pleased that the Review report states clearly that there is 'no evidence to suggest that any of the awards achieved by students pursuing studies through the member institutions are in question'. This accords with the results of recent audits and teaching quality assessments in the institutions.

The University is also pleased at the confidence judgement made regarding those of its programmes that are offered in collaboration with partner institutions, particularly overseas, and administered by its Validation Board and Unit. This confirms the findings of other recent external reviews, including individual institutional audits by the Agency.

However, the University takes very seriously the judgement of limited confidence in aspects of its management of quality and standards. It is working with the Agency and its member institutions to address the issues that have been identified. The judgement relates to structural arrangements, rather than to the standards of the awards themselves, and relates primarily to the Academic Framework that was put in place during the mid-1990s, under which responsibility for quality, but not standards, was devolved to the institutions.

The University accepts that the relationship between the central University and the institutions must be re-defined and has resolved that responsibility for both quality and standards will be fully devolved to the institutions. The University's response to the report will be based upon this devolved model.

In responding to the report, the University is building on developments that were already in hand when the Review took place. In early 2004 - that is, even before the Agency's Review - the University embarked upon an internal review of its roles and functions and of its relationships with the institutions. The Group that is carrying out this review has accepted that its report on the future of the University of Wales (which will be finalized in Spring 2005) should be predicated upon the devolved model.

Since the granting of degree-awarding powers to an institution provides assurance that it can exercise responsibility for University of Wales awards in its own right, responsibility for quality and standards will be fully devolved to an institution once it has secured degree-awarding powers of its own. Until then, interim arrangements will be put in place to provide adequate assurance regarding the management of quality and standards. The University has already made good progress on the definition of these arrangements which will involve increased external representation on key quality assurance bodies in the institutions.

The University is pleased to acknowledge that, in developing its response to the report, it has been able to work with senior officers in the Agency who, like the University, consider the devolved model to be an appropriate response to the conclusions of the Institutional Review.