

Outcomes from Institutional review in Wales

Part four: Institutions' intentions for enhancement and support for teaching and learning



Sharing good practice

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Overall summary

A consideration of the Institutional review reports published between October 2004 and August 2009 indicates that institutions in Wales had developed plans for enhancement and had well-managed arrangements for the support of teaching and learning.

The period in which the review reports were published saw a growth in interest in the explicit enhancement of quality, with institutions in Wales often linking it to wider strategic priorities. While the framework for enhancement was often set by the institution, academic units played an important role through their operation of the quality assurance processes that helped to identify and disseminate good practice. Staff development activities also played an important role. Enhancement often focused on the student learning experience, with developments, for example, in the use of e-learning, Welsh-medium activity, the link between teaching and research, and international collaboration.

The review reports found that institutions in Wales had a range of strategies, policies and procedures in place to assure the quality of teaching. In most cases, these were being conducted in line with institutional priorities, and were subject to effective coordination and oversight at senior level. Appointment and induction procedures, as well as reward systems, were being standardised within institutions, in part to support and recognise good practice in teaching. In a number of cases, institutional arrangements to provide induction to all staff, or to particular categories of staff, were found to be features of good practice. Difficulties were sometimes noted in coordinating the activities of multiple staff development providers, and some variability within institutions was identified in the operation of schemes for the appraisal of staff and for peer observation of teaching.

The review reports indicated that institutions in Wales had arrangements to support distributed and distance learning, even though such provision was often limited in scale. Institutions were found to take particular care over the approval of programmes delivered in this way, although for the most part, standard quality assurance procedures for monitoring and review applied. Virtual learning environments had been established by many institutions with mechanisms to support their use by staff and students. While some staff expressed considerable enthusiasm for the use of such technology, consistency of engagement had yet to be achieved within institutions in this rapidly developing area. The reports noted the frequent deployment of this kind of provision in support of institutional objectives for widening access to higher education.

Institutions' learning support resources were generally found to be carefully managed in line with strategic requirements, and were often aligned with wider strategies for teaching, learning and assessment. Some resource providers had recently been reconfigured. For the most part, the review reports found that learning support resource providers were responsive to student needs, and that the resources themselves were well regarded by students. A number of institutions were making improvements to access to information technology and library facilities for various categories of student, including postgraduate and international students.

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Much good practice was found in the academic supervision, guidance and personal support provided to students. The review reports noted that institutions were increasingly establishing central student services departments. The openness and approachability of staff, and the support available, were frequently praised by students. Some personal tutor systems were found to operate variably, however, with the initiative to make contact often left to the student. Institutions in Wales were found to make careful provision for the support of different categories of students, including international students, postgraduates, those studying through the medium of Welsh and those with disabilities. Careers education and employability were also being strongly pursued. While progress had been made in the implementation of personal development planning in most institutions, variations were found in its use. The reports noted that students themselves took an active role in providing support for their peers, and that institutions in Wales carefully evaluated their support arrangements in response to student views.

The findings of this paper are comparable to the findings of relevant *Outcomes from institutional audit* papers for England and Northern Ireland.

Preface

To provide institutions and other stakeholders with access to timely information on the findings of the Institutional review process, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales has commissioned the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to produce a series of short working papers, describing features of good practice and summarising recommendations from the review reports. These are published under the generic title *Outcomes from Institutional review* (hereafter, *Outcomes...* papers).

This paper is based on the findings of the Institutional review reports published between October 2004 and August 2009. QAA has also published two series of papers under the generic title *Outcomes from institutional audit*. The first series of these papers drew on the findings of the audit reports published for England and Northern Ireland by November 2004, while the second draws on the findings of those reports published between December 2004 and August 2006.

A feature of good practice in Institutional review is considered to be a process, a practice, or a way of handling matters which, **in the context of the particular institution**, is improving, or leading to the improvement of, the management of quality and/or academic standards, and learning and teaching. *Outcomes...* papers are intended to provide readers with pointers to where features of good practice relating to particular topics can be located in the published review reports. Each *Outcomes...* paper therefore identifies the features of good practice in individual reports associated with the particular topic and their location in the Main report. Although all features of good practice are listed, in the interests of brevity not all are discussed in this paper. In the initial listing in paragraph 6, the first reference is to the numbered or bulleted lists of features of good practice at the end of each Institutional review report, the second to the relevant paragraphs in Section 2 of the Main report. Throughout the body of this paper, references to features of good practice in the Institutional review reports give the institution's name and the paragraph number from Section 2 of the Main report.

It should be emphasised that the features of good practice discussed in this paper should be considered in their proper institutional context, and that each is perhaps best viewed as a stimulus to reflection and further development rather than as a model for emulation.

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Institutions' intentions for enhancement and support for teaching and learning: introduction and general overview

1 This paper is based on a review of the outcomes of the 12 Institutional review reports published for institutions in Wales between October 2004 and August 2009 (see Appendix 1, page 22). A note on the methodology used to produce this and other papers in this series can be found at Appendix 2 (page 23).

2 In order to establish the extent to which institutions in Wales had strategies, policies and procedures for enhancing their provision, and for assuring the quality of teaching and the quality of learning opportunities, the Institutional review process included enquiry into:

- institutions' intentions for enhancement
- the assurance of the quality of teaching staff: appointment, appraisal and reward
- the assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development
- the assurance of the quality of teaching delivered through distributed and distance methods
- learning support resources
- academic guidance, support and supervision
- personal support and guidance.

The reports of these enquiries form the basis for this paper.

3 QAA's guidance to Institutional review teams asked them to outline institutional arrangements in each of these areas, and to describe the view taken of them as expressed in the self-evaluation document (SED). In the case of the latter three elements, review teams were asked to consider the views of students, as expressed in the student written submission or in meetings with the team. Teams were asked to provide an analysis of these arrangements, based on what had been read in documentation and heard in meetings, commenting on the extent to which the SED was accurate, and in some cases, on the use of relevant reference points (for example, the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*)). Teams were also asked to comment on the extent to which arrangements were effective and applied consistently, to identify any gaps and to identify any good practice. Finally, review teams were asked to conclude whether an appropriate institutional overview was maintained.

4 Changes in the relationships between the University of Wales and other institutions were perhaps less in evidence in the topics considered in this paper, as against those considered in other papers in this series, as member institutions had always been responsible for matters related to the quality of provision.

Features of good practice

5 The following features of good practice relating to enhancement and support for teaching and learning were identified in the Institutional review reports:

Institutions' intentions for enhancement

- the work that the University is undertaking in support of Welsh-medium teaching through the activities of the Welsh Medium Teaching Development Unit [University of Wales, paragraph 153 i; paragraphs 46, 56, 89, 139 and 145]
- the mechanisms to bring senior staff together across the institution to promote consistency and contribute towards embedding enhancement [University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, paragraph 166 (first bullet point); paragraph 32]
- the systematic formulation and implementation of the University's enhancement strategies [Cardiff University, paragraph 201 (first bullet point); paragraph 33]
- the contribution of staff research activity to the quality of teaching and to the quality of student learning opportunities generally [Cardiff University, paragraph 201 (second bullet point); paragraph 33]
- the intent and practice of the University's commitment to widening international student mobility as part of its engagement with the Bologna Process [Swansea University, paragraph 208 (first bullet point); paragraphs 35 and 152]

Staff appointment, appraisal and reward

- the clear alignment of the processes around staff appointment, support and development with the University's strategic aims [University of Glamorgan, paragraph 269 (third bullet point); paragraphs 150, 156, 159, 188, 253 and 254]
- the careful and inclusive approach to the induction and mentoring of staff both on initial appointment and when taking on new responsibility [Swansea Metropolitan University, paragraph 164 (second bullet point); paragraph 100]

Staff support and development

- the work that the University is undertaking in support of Welsh-medium teaching through the activities of the Welsh Medium Teaching Development Unit [University of Wales, paragraph 153 i; paragraphs 46, 56, 89, 139 and 145]
- the effective strategic work of the Learning and Teaching Panel [University of Wales, Newport, paragraph 169 i; paragraphs 28 and 102]
- the provision of staff development for visiting tutors [University of Wales, Newport, paragraph 169 ii; paragraph 99]
- the strong staff development opportunities in place [Trinity College, Carmarthen, paragraph 190 iv; paragraphs 125 to 128 and 130]
- the systematic approach to staff support and professional development [Cardiff University, paragraph 201 (sixth bullet point); paragraph 124]
- the clear alignment of the processes around staff appointment, support and development with the University's strategic aims [University of Glamorgan, paragraph 269 (third bullet point); paragraphs 150, 156, 159, 188, 253 and 254]

- the institutional capacity to initiate and manage effective measures for the support of staff and students [Swansea Metropolitan University, paragraph 164 (third bullet point); paragraph 101]
- the high priority given to the provision of effective and accessible staff development opportunities for all categories of staff [Swansea Metropolitan University, paragraph 164 (fourth bullet point); paragraph 106]

Distributed and distance learning

- the ready access students have to academic and personal support, which is facilitated by the commitment of staff in enabling students to achieve the most from their learning experience [the report referred to the use of e-learning on a particular programme that 'demonstrated the commitment of staff to providing students with access to higher education and all possible support for the learning experience', paragraph 97] [North East Wales Institute of Higher Education, paragraph 160 ii; paragraphs 97, 106 and 110]
- the arrangements in place to support those students studying through distance-learning methods, particularly in the Department of Information Studies [University of Wales, Aberystwyth, paragraph 103 iii; paragraph 38]

Learning support resources

- the consultation process, development and implementation of the institutional [Information Technology] Strategy [University of Wales, Newport, paragraph 169 iii; paragraphs 111 to 113]
- good strategic planning in general and, in particular, with regard to the College's mission and the needs of national bilingualism [specifically, the report referred to the institution's development of a Cultural Enterprise Centre and a training centre for the Welsh Nursery Group, paragraph 137] [Trinity College, Carmarthen, paragraph 190 i; paragraphs 24, 27, 73, 137, 145 and 161]
- the many forms of external engagement offered in the student learning experience [Trinity College, Carmarthen, paragraph 190 iii; paragraphs 109, 111, 137, 141 to 142 and 150]
- the strong commitment to a range of services to support and enhance the student experience [University of Glamorgan, paragraph 269 (fourth bullet point); paragraphs 181, 187, 197, 250 and 251]

Academic guidance, support and supervision

- good strategic planning in general and, in particular, with regard to the College's mission and the needs of national bilingualism [specifically, the report referred to the Student Union's commendation of the commitment to the Welsh language made by the institution, which had responded to student feedback regarding facilities and made new appointments in the language improvement area, paragraph 145] [Trinity College, Carmarthen, paragraph 190 i; paragraphs 24, 27, 73, 137, 145 and 161]
- the many forms of external engagement offered in the student learning experience [the report referred in particular to the availability of placement

learning, educational visits and field trips, and the information provided to various categories of student, paragraphs 141 to 142] [Trinity College, Carmarthen, paragraph 190 iii; paragraphs 109, 111, 137, 141 to 142 and 150]

- the ready access students have to academic and personal support, which is facilitated by the commitment of staff in enabling students to achieve the most from their learning experience [North East Wales Institute of Higher Education, paragraph 160 ii; paragraphs 97, 106 and 110]
- the high level of support given by Welsh-speaking academics to students studying in the medium of Welsh [University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 103 vi; paragraphs 76 to 77]
- effective and enthusiastic implementation of widening participation initiatives [in particular the report referred to the range of specific initiatives 'to encourage progression into higher education from under-represented groups' and also to the evidence provided of the benefits of this strategy to students] [University of Wales, Lampeter, paragraph 190 i; paragraph 125]
- the online process accessible to all staff for the tracking of postgraduate research students [Swansea University, paragraph 208 (fifth bullet point); paragraphs 92, 96 and 133]
- the clear alignment of the processes around staff appointment, support and development with the University's strategic aims [University of Glamorgan, paragraph 269 (third bullet point); paragraphs 150, 156, 159, 188, 253 and 254]
- the strong commitment to a range of services to support and enhance the student experience [University of Glamorgan, paragraph 269 (fourth bullet point); paragraphs 181, 187, 197, 250 and 251]
- the effective and responsive support given to a diverse range of students at all levels of the University [Swansea Metropolitan University, paragraph 164 (fifth bullet point); paragraph 118]

Personal support and guidance

- the student mentor scheme [University of Wales, Newport, paragraph 169 iv; paragraph 123]
- the many forms of external engagement offered in the student learning experience [in particular, the report referred to the strength of the Careers Service; the comprehensiveness of the Careers Education and Guidance Policy; the services offered to students, for example interviews and advice offered in English and Welsh; and the value added by contracts with various national initiatives to support careers and employability, paragraph 150] [Trinity College, Carmarthen, paragraph 190 iii; paragraphs 109, 111, 137, 141 to 142 and 150]
- the ready access students have to academic and personal support, which is facilitated by the commitment of staff in enabling students to achieve the most from their learning experience [North East Wales Institute of Higher Education, paragraph 160 ii; paragraphs 97, 106 and 110]
- the work of the Careers Advisory Service in operating both the Student Skills Competition as a means of gaining feedback from employers of the students' acquisition of transferable skills and the Year in Employment Scheme [University of Wales, Aberystwyth, paragraph 103 v; paragraphs 58 to 59 and 80]

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- the provision of peer guides for students at their induction, which is indicative of [a] careful approach to support for students which lasts throughout their time at the institution [University of Wales, Bangor, paragraph 91 vi; paragraph 76]
- a comprehensive range of centrally provided student support [University of Wales, Lampeter, paragraph 190 ii; paragraph 136]
- the strong commitment to a range of services to support and enhance the student experience [University of Glamorgan, paragraph 269 (fourth bullet point); paragraphs 181, 187, 197, 250 and 251].

Institutions' intentions for enhancement

6 The Institutional review reports generally discussed institutions' intentions for enhancement in positive terms. Four reports identified features of good practice linked to his area, while two reports made recommendations.

7 The review reports identified a growing interest in enhancement among institutions, while some of the later examples noted that it had already been made an important element of quality arrangements. While some of the institutions noted the personal responsibility of staff to enhance their practice, almost all saw a role for themselves in providing a climate or framework within which enhancement could occur, or in ensuring that quality assurance procedures did not stifle it. At the time of their reviews, a number of institutions had recently commissioned or received reports or projects on enhancement or related topics (for example on student expectations, or student support services) that were helping to guide their efforts in this area.

8 Enhancement activities were often governed by institutions' strategic plans, strategies for learning, teaching and assessment, quality and standards or research. Only a minority of review reports mentioned separate enhancement strategies. In a few cases, the reports noted opportunities for enhancement to be put on a more strategic footing. For example in one case, where plans for the formalisation and coordination of quality enhancement activities were at an early stage, the report suggested that the institution consider the development of a quality enhancement strategy, to link with that relating to teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that 'a wide-ranging and coordinated engagement with the quality enhancement agenda is achieved across the [institution]'. In another case, the institution's approach to enhancement was characterised as "enabling" rather than "strategic", and the report suggested a more structured approach, particularly with regard to the dissemination of good practice. On the other hand, one report found that the systematic way that an institution had formulated and implemented its enhancement strategies was a feature of good practice [Cardiff University, paragraph 33].

9 Oversight was provided for enhancement activities in some institutions by central deliberative committees. These committees were supported by various units or groups, dedicated to the enhancement of learning and teaching or to teaching through the medium of Welsh. Good practice was found in the work of the University of Wales' Welsh Medium Teaching Development Unit, and in its initiatives in this area, which included subject panels to plan and enhance Welsh-medium provision; the creation of a database of Welsh language examiners; the provision of an e-journal and website supportive of Welsh-medium provision; and the formulation of a staff development

strategy [University of Wales, paragraph 56]. In another institution the work of a central learning and teaching unit was noted positively, although confusion regarding its role was identified among staff in schools. The report suggested that the unit would benefit from clarifying its structure and reinforcing its supportive role with schools.

10 Faculties or schools were often found to play an important role in enhancement and in the identification of good practice, through their responsibilities for quality and standards of their provision, and through quality assurance processes, most notably annual monitoring, periodic or departmental reviews, internal audits or thematic reviews. Student views were taken account of in relation to enhancement, through student representation and feedback arrangements and through consideration of the results of the National Student Survey (NSS). Some reports noted examples of how quality assurance processes were being altered to take greater account of enhancement. In two institutions however, variations in the understanding and operation of quality assurance procedures across academic units were seen to have the potential to hinder quality enhancement. One report recommended the institution to 'keep under review the development of practice within faculties, having particular regard to key information sources such as monitoring and student feedback'.

11 Quality assurance procedures were also found to play a part in disseminating good practice. In one case, the institution provided increased opportunities to take part in preliminary validation panels and school audit teams to enable staff to benchmark their activities against those of other schools. In another case, good practice was found in the variety of groups that brought senior staff together to promote consistency and contribute towards the embedding of enhancement [University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, paragraph 32]. The development of staff was an important theme, with the reports noting the operation of learning and teaching, or other units, and various staff development support, including the payment of Higher Education Academy membership fees, the development of postgraduate awards in learning and teaching for staff, and teaching fellowship schemes. Also of note was the use of staff development advisers and champions for change or for learning and teaching, as well as newsletters, seminars and discussion fora.

12 Institutions identified various priorities for enhancement, including the need to improve the student learning experience, the quality of provision or the quality of learning and teaching. Specific areas of enhancement included developments in relation to e-learning, Welsh-medium activity, student support, and assessment. Other priorities included developing the link between teaching and research, and in one institution, where research, teaching and learning, innovation and engagement were seen to be inextricably interlinked, the review report identified the contribution of staff research activity to the quality of teaching and student learning opportunities as a feature of good practice [Cardiff University, paragraph 33]. In another case, the institution intended to widen its international profile through increasing its collaborative provision and international study opportunities, and the report noted well developed support through Erasmus officers, disability provision, customised information packs and a Bologna Officer linked to a strategic priority for employability [Swansea University, paragraph 35].

Staff appointment, appraisal and reward

13 The Institutional review reports found that institutions generally had robust policies and procedures for the appointment of staff, and for their appraisal and reward. Features of good practice were linked to this area in two reports while one report made a recommendation.

14 The regulation and management of staff appointment and appraisal through institutional human resource strategies or policies was commented upon in almost all the review reports. Generally, the strategies provided guidance for academic units and staff on procedures relating to these areas. In addition, strategies articulated human resource developments with institutional priorities and planning. In a number of institutions the implementation of a strategy was supported through a human resources committee or task group reporting to a senior institutional committee or management group, and two reports noted that responsibility for human resource matters lay at Pro Vice-Chancellor level. In one case, a report found that the human resources policy was 'well articulated with institutional strategy', and noted the positive views of staff regarding such policies, and their operation. An example of the human resources policy providing support for institutional objectives (in this case the attainment of degree awarding powers) was a requirement for academic appointees to have or be able to gain a doctoral degree within five years.

15 There was evidence that several institutions were standardising procedures and criteria for the appointment of academic staff. One report noted that a guidance manual had been introduced. These developments were designed to achieve greater consistency in the appointment process for all categories of academic staff (full-time, part-time or fixed term) or to help achieve institutional objectives.

16 All the review reports noted that institutions provided induction programmes for new academic staff and in one institution there was strong staff approval for the process, which included all categories of staff and was supported by a handbook, intranet materials and mentoring. One institution's induction and mentoring of new staff, and those taking on new responsibilities, was identified as a feature of good practice [Swansea Metropolitan University, paragraph 100]. Mentoring or 'buddying' for a year or more was a feature of several induction programmes and was designed to augment initial induction activities. Another common feature was the requirement for new staff with no or limited teaching experience to study on an in-house postgraduate certificate in higher education, which usually was accredited by the Higher Education Academy. Probationary periods for academic staff, varying in length from one to three years, were referred to in several reports. In one case, newly appointed staff found that a three-year probation period allowed them 'appropriate opportunity to develop their teaching and research skills and also to derive benefit from peer observation'.

17 Almost all the review reports made observations on institutional appraisal or performance review procedures. Generally, appraisal was seen as a developmental process, commonly encompassing peer observation and, to a lesser extent, student feedback. In several institutions the outcomes of appraisals were collated centrally or at faculty level and were used to assess overall staff development needs. One institution had articulated the expectations made of academic staff through the development

of an academic descriptor, which was applied to staff recruitment, selection, appraisal and promotion. In two other cases, however, institutional appraisal schemes had fallen into abeyance, even though some departments continued to use appraisal for developmental purposes. In the first example, the reintroduction of the institutional scheme was being considered as part of a new performance review process, while in the second, the institution took the view that re-implementation could take two years, and was encouraged by the report to make this a priority.

18 During the period under discussion, institutions in Wales were in the process of implementing the National Framework Agreement and the Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA) scheme, and in some cases this had occasioned a review of promotion procedures. The review reports noted that some institutions had developed well-defined criteria for different academic grades, which covered teaching, research, income generation and management, with promotion to Reader or Professor generally requiring a significant or substantial research profile. In addition, several institutions were in the process of developing reward systems and in some cases this was seen as part of their promotion schemes. The review reports noted two cases where reward was linked to objectives to increase the institution's research profile and included funding for doctoral study and sabbatical leave. In one research-led institution there was recognition for outstanding teaching through a Distinguished Teaching Award scheme and in others, teaching fellowships were available. In contrast, one institution had made a decision not to introduce a reward scheme, arguing that 'to reward some staff for teaching in a teaching-led institution where all staff should be aiming for excellence would undermine that aim and could be demotivating'. Nonetheless, the report recommended that the institution consider adopting a more structured approach to the identification and dissemination of good practice.

Staff support and development

19 Strength was found in Welsh institutions' arrangements for supporting and developing their staff. Features of good practice were identified in six institutional review reports, while recommendations were made in three reports.

20 Most of the review reports referred to the manner in which staff development activities reflected institutional priorities. Approaches to ensuring that this alignment was achieved included the work of an institutional staff development committee or group, the reporting of individual staff development reviews to a central development unit, or through human resources staff meeting formally with heads of academic units. One institution was looking to strengthen its strategic approach through revising the remit of its staff development committee. This and other revisions were noted positively by the relevant report. The linking of staff development to other strategies and policies was usually achieved through the human resources department, a staff development committee or in one instance by close linkages between faculty and departmental plans and a University Plan. One report found good practice in the work of a Learning and Teaching Panel, in its role as a forum for sharing good practice and in promoting the development of academic practice though additional funding [University of Wales, Newport, paragraph 102].

21 The review reports indicated that for some institutions, leadership of staff development and control of associated budgets rested within academic schools and departments. Most institutions had a unit dedicated to staff and/or academic development, which provided a range of courses, events and other development opportunities. Such units, for example, collated school and departmental assessments of individual needs, promoted the exchange of good practice, provided support for institutional initiatives or administered fellowship or award schemes. In three cases, reports found good practice in systematic approaches to staff support and professional development [Cardiff University, paragraph 124; Swansea Metropolitan University, paragraph 101; University of Glamorgan, paragraph 159].

22 A potential area of concern in staff development is the difficulty of remaining focused on institutional needs where opportunities are available from a number of different sources (for example, schools, departments and centres for pedagogic study or staff development). One institution had recognised this concern and was considering the role and function of its staff development unit, while another had recently completed a review of this area. The need for a systematic framework for staff development, notwithstanding the valuable provision already on offer, was identified in one report. In another a recommendation was made where staff were found to be uncertain about the relationship between school plans and institutional level development activities, and where the location of responsibility for monitoring was unclear.

23 The common approach to identifying individual development needs was through appraisal or performance review processes (including peer observation of teaching). The review reports identified some variability between academic units in the operation of the peer observation, and one report suggested that the institution ensure that its faculties developed and implemented such a scheme, and recommended that it should consider the continued development of effective methods of peer review for all staff. Good practice was observed, however, in an institution's approach to peer observation, which was a 'cyclical system of organised peer review sessions in which the whole range of academic related activities are observed and reflected upon. The outcomes lead to the identification and dissemination of good practice and planned staff development' [University of Glamorgan, paragraph 156]. As noted in paragraph 16 of this paper, the need for development for new or inexperienced staff was usually recognised and certificated through an in-house postgraduate award, while for more experienced staff, support was sometimes provided for applications for fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. The reports noted that in a new development, two institutions were creating a continuing professional development framework linked to the UK professional standards framework and formally accredited by the Higher Education Academy.

24 In one case the broad range of staff development opportunities on offer (including funding for training courses, a staff development week and certificated awards in learning and teaching), was regarded as a feature of good practice [Trinity College, Carmarthen, paragraphs 125 to 128 and 130]. In addition, a number of institutions were reported to be providing staff development opportunities for part-time or visiting tutors and for staff from collaborative partners. In one case, good practice was found in the extension of significant development opportunities to

visiting staff 'which secured motivation and retention...thus strongly supporting the quality of the provision and enhancing the student experience' [University of Wales, Newport, paragraph 99]. In another, the review report noted as good practice 'the care given to the provision of effective and accessible development opportunities for all categories of staff' [Swansea Metropolitan University, paragraph 106]. In addition, some reports noted arrangements for the preparation of postgraduate students for teaching. In one case, detailed requirements existed in this regard, including general training, course-specific guidance, and mentoring and teaching observation. There was also collaboration between institutions, with encouragement for staff to consider the opportunities on offer at neighbouring institutions in keeping with the Welsh Assembly Government's desire to see greater efficiency in the Welsh higher education sector.

Distributed and distance learning

25 The Institutional review reports suggested that Welsh institutions' involvement in distributed and distance learning was, for the most part, small in scale, and sometimes restricted to the operations of a single department. The reports focused particularly on approaches to e-learning and blended learning, and in some cases highlighted practice within a programme or department that provided a model for more extensive development across the institution. Features of good practice were identified in two reports, and a recommendation was made in one report.

26 Most of the review reports recorded that distributed and distance learning provision followed normal institutional quality assurance procedures; usually with a supplement to provide further guidance for the approval of programmes delivered through such means. In one case, however, some quality assurance processes for the approval of modifications were less observably implemented and this contributed to a wider recommendation on ensuring the transparency of quality assurance outcomes. Reports published earlier in the cycle noted engagement with QAA's *Guidelines on the quality assurance of distance learning* (1999), while a number of the later reports referred to engagement with the revised *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* (2004). In one case, a report encouraged the institution to make full use of the *Code of practice* in developing its policies and practices in this area.

27 A small number of institutions had developed strategic approaches to distributed and distance learning and had considered the impact that developments in this area would have on other strategies and policies. Support for this mode of learning centred on the needs of staff and students and ranged from informal help from tutors and peers to the establishment of institutional support units or teams. Goals and aspirations included the provision of Welsh language education for a region, and the support of off-campus learning and teaching within the local community. A number of reports noted that the commitment of staff was a key element in successful delivery of this type of provision. In one case, students were found to be 'well-supported by enthusiastic and dedicated staff who demonstrated a good understanding of the quality issues inherent in this mode of delivery' [University of Wales, Aberystwyth, paragraph 38]. Two institutions had a shared virtual learning environment (VLE) system which had been supported by funding for innovation and third mission

initiatives, provided by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). This development had allowed one of the institutions to gain Welsh Assembly Government funding for the provision of Welsh language training through an e-learning approach within mid and west Wales.

28 The review reports indicated that distributed and distance learning played an important role in lifelong learning and widening access to higher education. In one institution, it provided a range of methods of delivery appropriate to an agenda for equality and diversity. In a broad approach, another institution was taking the lead in establishing a 'community university', which would provide a vehicle for the delivery of its non-standard provision. Elsewhere, one department with a very high proportion of distributed and distance-learning provision was operating as 'the principal arm of the [institution] for widening access' and provided educational programmes for a number of community projects. One report noted that a programme delivered by blended learning was highly regarded by part-time students. In this case, there were extensive support arrangements, including a comprehensive introduction to the use of the VLE and responsive technical support. The use of the system was subject to monitoring and staff had carefully considered the balance of face-to-face and e-learning tuition. The report noted as good practice 'the commitment of staff to providing students with access to higher education and all possible support for the learning experience' [North East Wales Institute of Higher Education, paragraph 97].

Learning support resources

29 Learning support resources in Welsh institutions were generally found to be well managed and appropriate to the needs of students. The Institutional review reports identified features of good practice relating to learning support resources in three reports, while recommendations were made in two reports.

30 The review reports noted that a number of institutions had produced strategic plans for the development of their learning support resources, commonly in the form of a number of related strategies, for example, on e-learning, information communications technology (ICT), the learning environment and estates. Plans for the development of these resources also featured in institutional strategic plans or overarching learning and teaching strategies. One report identified the planning process used to support the ICT strategy as a feature of good practice, in its wide consultation process, its comprehensiveness, its explicit relationship to a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, and its committed budget expenditure [University of Wales, Newport, paragraph 113]. Another report noted the institution's aspiration to provide a learning environment that supported different modes of learning, while a further report noted a partnership approach, involving the registry, student support services, information services, a finance directorate, academic schools and others. In one instance, a report observed that further work was in progress for integrating e-learning into the institution's overall approach to learning and teaching, and funding provided through the HEFCW reconfiguration and collaboration initiative had been used to establish a joint centre of excellence in e-learning.

31 The review reports indicated that a small majority of institutions had moved to provide an integrated service to students through establishing a combined library and information services department; other institutions continued to maintain separate units. A range of committees and other groups developed policy and provided guidance, and these included ICT or e-learning committees, and for library services in particular there was a tradition of academic school or departmental representatives liaising with a nominated colleague within the library. Budgets for library provision could be discussed through this liaison. In one instance, the report commented on the availability of funding from a variety of different sources, and noted that some schools had overspent on library allocations as a result of recent validations. The report recommended that the institution 'adopt a more strategic approach to planning for learning resource requirements in the context of the ongoing process of curriculum renewal'.

32 Most institutions had developed VLE platforms, often supported by small teams of technologists. While the review reports noted a high level of engagement with the VLE in the most developed schemes, usage sometimes varied across academic departments, perhaps reflecting the rapidly developing nature of this area. Institutions also had centrally-maintained ICT networks. A development reported commonly was of campus-wide wireless networks and in one institution there was a facility for up to 100 students to borrow wireless-enabled laptops, while elsewhere a purchase scheme for electronic notebooks existed. Some reports mentioned one or more computing rooms being available on 24-hour access. It was reported that most institutions were providing comprehensive induction and training for students in the use of ICT. One institution was developing and evaluating an information literacy strategy. Other approaches provided training for students and staff through induction courses, workshops, guides, websites, tutoring and a VLE skills module.

33 In relation to learning and teaching accommodation, the review reports generally referred to the upgrading of rooms through the provision of data projectors and interactive whiteboards. Where mentioned, the allocation of teaching accommodation was generally managed centrally and in one case this was creating tensions in placing constraints on the strategic plans of academic schools. One institution with a strong tradition of promoting Welsh language and culture had built a cultural enterprise centre including a Welsh-medium theatre, which the report saw as evidence of good practice in the institution's planning to support its mission, and as providing opportunities for external engagement to students [Trinity College, Carmarthen, paragraph 137].

34 A positive feature mentioned in almost all the review reports was the high level of student satisfaction with learning support resources, particularly with ICT facilities. This was revealed through internal student satisfaction surveys, the NSS, and feedback from user groups and it is clear that, for the most part, institutions had responded rapidly to feedback on this topic. In one case, students reported themselves to be particularly pleased with the institution's responsiveness to their wish for around-the-clock access to the library during the examination period. Library opening hours, however, were a concern in one or two institutions, especially for postgraduate and international students. In one case, the report recommended that the institution revisit an unresolved concern around library opening hours during vacations.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

35 The Institutional review reports identified particular strength in Welsh institutions' arrangements for academic guidance, support and supervision, and for personal support and guidance. In terms of the former, seven reports identified features of good practice, while only one made a recommendation.

36 The review reports indicated that support was available to students throughout their studies and that students commonly noted easy access to staff, who had an open and helpful attitude. In one institution, good practice was found in the access to academic support given to students, and the report noted in this 'the commitment of staff in enabling students to achieve the most from their learning experience' [North East Wales Institute of Higher Education, paragraph 106]. In another institution, the effective and responsive support given to students at all levels was also identified as a feature of good practice, including 'tailoring the academic day to meet the personal circumstances of mature postgraduate students, providing academic support sessions in the workplace for part-time undergraduate students and introductory days after recruitment, but before formal enrolment, for new students'. Institutions' arrangements for providing academic support often involved the deployment of academic and specialist support staff and the provision of information through handbooks and electronic media.

37 The principal source of academic and pastoral guidance for undergraduate students in most institutions was the personal tutor, supported by specialist staff where students needed referral to professional support. Further academic support for students was also provided through year and course tutors. It sometimes appeared, however, that following an initial meeting between tutor and tutee, the student needed to be proactive in seeking advice, even where regular contact was mandatory. The reports noted some variability between schools or departments in the operation of such schemes, and some difficulty in monitoring the effectiveness of such systems. One institution, however, was noted to provide training for personal tutors and a number provided personal tutor handbooks.

38 The review reports indicated that an important element in supporting undergraduate student progression was the use of personal development planning (PDP) or the use of progress files. Almost all the institutions had adopted PDP in some form, though there was acknowledgement in some reports that monitoring was limited and that embedding within academic practice varied. The usual approach was one of student ownership and management of PDP aided by electronic support, workshops and modules; direct staff input was sometimes limited. Practice appeared divided as to how far PDP was integrated into the curriculum. One report noted the view taken by some students that PDP was least effective when it was not integrated with programme structures or student career aspirations. In that institution, a teaching fellowship had been awarded to study the link between PDP and the curriculum. Three reports indicated that successful aspects of PDP were related to career development activities. Another report noted that PDP was mandatory for students on some professional programmes but was optional for other students.

39 For postgraduate research students, support was generally provided through a director of studies and a supervisory team. A number of review reports indicated the provision of formal handbooks to cover supervisory arrangements. The reports noted that the supervisor or team were primarily responsible for monitoring student progress, and oversight was provided through regular reporting to a postgraduate office, a faculty-based director of postgraduate studies, or a research degrees committee. At one institution, the Postgraduate Research Faculty had an online process for tracking research student progress, in part to ensure the equitable treatment of students, and this was noted as a feature of good practice [Swansea University, paragraph 133]. The reports indicated that the establishment of a dedicated office, school or faculty allowed institutions to provide centrally a range of support for postgraduate studies, which included induction for students, training for supervisors, and research skills development. At one institution, matters of concern regarding support could be raised through a Research Students' Forum. In contrast, the review report for another institution noted that there was a need for more effective representation of postgraduate research student concerns.

40 A key feature of supporting students noted in almost all review reports was the provision of handbooks from institutional or departmental level through to the programme or module level. In order to provide consistency of information, one institution had issued a template for programme handbooks and the latter were periodically reviewed by the academic registry. A variety of elements were discussed in such handbooks, including intended learning outcomes, definitions of plagiarism and associated penalties, assessment criteria, skills training and sources of academic support, and guidance on module choice, placements and study abroad. One recommendation related to the support provided to students in choosing modules. While the curriculum allowed considerable flexibility in the matter of module choice, the final decision was left to students themselves, and in some cases choices had been made that had entailed heavy workloads in a particular semester, or had doubtfully accorded with the registered programme title. The report recommended that the institution review this area 'so as to enable students to make module choices that provide balanced and realistic workloads and meet the requirements of the awards for which they are registered'.

41 The review reports demonstrated that institutions had in place a variety of arrangements for supporting different categories of students. One report found good practice in the deployment of academic support in pursuance of a widening participation agenda, and the 'effective and enthusiastic' implementation of a strategy to encourage progression to higher education from under-represented groups [University of Wales, Lampeter, paragraph 125]. Students on placement or work experience were supported by tutor visits. In one case, an institution's arrangements for providing information to students on placements or studying abroad and to international students were noted positively. In two institutions, the reports identified strong arrangements for supporting those studying through the medium of Welsh [University of Wales, Aberystwyth, paragraphs 76 to 77; Trinity College, Carmarthen, paragraph 145]. In the latter institution, it was recognised that the support needed by students on bilingual programmes was likely to differ from those required by students on single language programmes, be that in Welsh or English. For international students, English language and study skills courses were available and sometimes coordinated through an international office.

Personal support and guidance

42 The Institutional review reports generally focused on the comprehensiveness of personal support and guidance, and how this linked with academic guidance, with some institutions looking to provide a 'fluid' or 'seamless' framework of support. Features of good practice were identified in seven reports, while none made recommendations.

43 Most institutions had moved to, or were considering, delivery of student support services from a single student services office, centre or department. In one institution, however, the location of some elements of support services within faculties was seen as 'a further example of the University's strong commitment to a range of services to support and enhance the student experience' [University of Glamorgan, paragraph 187]. The range of services on offer was similar from institution to institution and included personal counselling, welfare advice, financial advice and hardship funding, childcare and nursery facilities, dyslexia and disability support, and a chaplaincy. In some institutions, advice was available in English and Welsh. One report noted that in order to increase the visibility of services and to allow easier access, the institution had set up a services information desk and students had praised the support that they had received. An interesting feature mentioned in two reports was that, following the growth of support services, the personal tutoring system was no longer seen by students as the keystone of support. Good practice was found in the wide range of centrally provided support services on offer in one institution, in which a concern was evident 'to provide an experience tailored to meet the requirements of a wide range of individual student needs' [University of Wales, Lampeter, paragraph 136]. Another report identified a 'strong ethos...for ensuring that student support provided a firm foundation to the learning experience' [North East Wales Institute of Higher Education, paragraph 110].

44 There was widespread recognition of students' interest in support arrangements and their important role in helping to provide support for their peers. In many institutions, delivery of personal support services was shared with students' representative bodies, and in two cases the reports identified good practice in the use of student mentors to provide support. In the first case, a student mentoring scheme had been piloted in one school, with the support of central funding, and this was subsequently evaluated and implemented across the institution. The report found that the institution 'had given careful consideration to the retention issues it had identified' and that the scheme was a feature of good practice [University of Wales, Newport, paragraph 123]. In a second institution, a peer guide scheme to help students through induction, featuring a handbook, training and the evaluation of outcomes, was 'reflective of the institution's careful overall approach to support for students...' [University of Wales, Bangor, paragraph 76].

45 Most review reports referred to the personal support available for international students, which was generally coordinated by an international office. Typically, these offices provided arrival and induction programmes, advice on immigration requirements and English language courses. In one institution, this was extended to assisting staff awareness of the learning styles of different cultures. Support for disabled students also featured strongly in the reports with institutions, for example,

providing screening and support for those with dyslexia. One institution, through a Recording Centre for the Blind, provided a pan-Wales service that involved the recording and storage of learning materials with retrieval available in a format of choice. The same institution also had a Disability Office which trained and coordinated the work of student volunteers, and its work was noted as having 'materially affected the work and well-being' of some students.

46 Careers advice and guidance featured in most of the review reports. A common feature was the embedding of careers education, usually in the form of employability, within the curriculum. Schemes included the award of credit for workplace experience and employment-related modules, a careers development programme within the curriculum, career workshops, and the presence of an employability 'champion' within academic schools. In one case, good practice was found in a Year in Employment scheme designed to develop employability skills, and this was highly regarded by students [University of Wales, Aberystwyth, paragraph 80]. Guidance and advice to students were usually provided by a careers development unit within student services. In one institution, the careers service had combined with the library and information service and had developed an approach for providing careers and employment education through the institution's PDP scheme, which was built around students developing an e-portfolio. Some reports indicated that the units in smaller institutions were providing a link to national employability schemes. In one case, the institution had a comprehensive careers education and guidance policy, through which support was offered in both Welsh and English and value added through Graduate Wales/Graduate Support, a Work Placement contract and the Careers Wales Adult Guidance Contract [Trinity College, Carmarthen, paragraph 150].

47 For most institutions, evaluation of student support services was based upon user surveys or annual student satisfaction questionnaires. The review reports noted the introduction of a self-evaluation process for student services, reviews at institutional or departmental levels, and annual reporting to a central deliberative committee. While there were occasional complaints on specific matters, most reports indicated high levels of satisfaction among students with the provision of support services.

Conclusion and comparative review

48 Overall, the Institutional review reports indicated that institutions in Wales had positive plans and mechanisms for enhancement and strong and well-managed arrangements for supporting teaching and learning. The findings of this paper align well with those of papers in the *Outcomes from institutional audit series* on:

- Staff support and development arrangements
- Learning support resources (including virtual learning environments)
- Institutions' support for e-learning
- Academic guidance, support and supervision, and personal support and guidance
- Arrangements for international students.

49 In discussing intentions for enhancement, the review reports noted institutions' role in setting frameworks or strategic priorities. While strength was found in the strategic work of some institutions, in others opportunities to further the link between institutional goals and enhancement activities were identified. While oversight for institutional enhancement activities was frequently provided by or through central committees and/or units, enhancement was also driven at faculty or school levels through the operation of quality assurance processes. Staff development activities and the dissemination of good practice formed important themes. Particular priorities for enhancement varied depending on the institutions' strategic aspirations, but often focused on the student learning experience, and examples included developments in e-learning, Welsh-medium activity, and the linkages between teaching and research.

50 Institutions in Wales were found to have developed comprehensive schemes for the induction of new staff. The strategies, policies and procedures for staff appointment, appraisal and reward outlined in this paper are comparable to those discussed in the *Outcomes from institutional audit* papers on staff support and development. In the main, Welsh institutions' arrangements were found to be appropriate to their needs and robust in implementation. Both this paper and its counterparts for England and Northern Ireland identify some variability in the implementation of staff appraisal or peer observation schemes, with some institutions in Wales reconsidering their usefulness and purpose.

51 In terms of staff support and development arrangements, Welsh institutions showed a similar concern to that identified in the *Outcomes from institutional audit* papers for ensuring that staff development activities supported strategies and priorities, and were centrally coordinated. However, as in England and Northern Ireland, it was recognised that at times difficulties could arise where the provision of support and training was spread across a range of units. Training of new academic staff similarly mirrored the practice noted elsewhere, with most Welsh institutions having postgraduate awards in teaching and learning accredited by the Higher Education Academy. Two Welsh institutions also had Higher Education Academy-accredited Continuing Professional Development frameworks and in this approach to the professionalisation of higher education teaching, the Welsh sector was providing a lead for the rest of the UK.

52 While Welsh institutions' involvement in distributed and distance learning was often conducted on a small scale, a comparison with the *Outcomes from institutional audit* papers on e-learning and learning support resources suggests a similar level of development with those of many institutions in England and Northern Ireland. Apart from the approval stage, where additional criteria sometimes applied, institutions usually subjected distributed and distance learning provision to normal quality assurance procedures, and it was apparent that strategic overview of developments was maintained. Of particular note was the way Welsh institutions were using flexible and distributed learning to address a key Welsh Assembly Government priority for higher education: widening access. Both this paper and its counterparts for England and Northern Ireland note frequent references to the enthusiasm of staff and students for this kind of provision.

53 The review reports for institutions in Wales noted that learning support resources in institutions were well managed, and that students had frequently expressed high levels of satisfaction with them. Like the *Outcomes from institutional audit* papers on learning support resources, this paper finds that approaches to the planning and monitoring of such resources included the widespread application of annual monitoring, audits, user surveys and more informal feedback. Overall, there was an effective institutional overview and this was reflected in strategic developments, including reconfiguration of learning support services and integration with overarching learning, teaching and assessment strategies.

54 Considerable strength was found in Welsh institutions' provision of both academic and personal support. Most institutions maintained personal tutor schemes, although there was an apparent growth in centrally-provided student services. In a number of areas there were strong parallels between this paper and the findings of the *Outcomes from institutional audit* paper on academic guidance, support and supervision, and personal support and guidance. In both, students noted the accessibility of academic staff, but variations were identified in the deployment of personal tutors. While it is clear that progress has been made in both sectors in implementing personal development planning, some Welsh institutions were facing similar challenges to those in England and Northern Ireland in establishing minimum requirements and monitoring arrangements. Both papers note that institutions appeared to be making improvements to their arrangements for the support of postgraduate students, particularly with regard to academic supervision.

55 The review reports showed that institutions in Wales actively sought student opinion on the support services provided and responded quickly to concerns or changes in demand. In this respect the Welsh institutions were comparable to those in England and Northern Ireland, as evidenced through the *Outcomes from institutional audit* papers on academic and personal support and arrangements for international students. This last group had support which included pre-arrival, induction and language support activities. A strong feature highlighted in the review reports was the provision of careers education, information and guidance. A significant number of institutions had linked careers education to employability and in this respect were responding to a priority for higher education identified by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Appendix 1: The Institutional review reports

The Institutional review reports considered in these papers are listed below.

University of Wales

University of Wales, Newport

Trinity College, Carmarthen¹

North East Wales Institute of Higher Education²

University of Wales, Bangor³

University of Wales, Aberystwyth⁴

University of Wales, Lampeter

University of Wales Institute, Cardiff

Swansea University

Cardiff University

University of Glamorgan

Swansea Metropolitan University

¹ Now Trinity University College

² Now Glyndŵr University

³ Now Bangor University

⁴ Now Aberystwyth University

Appendix 2: Methodology

The analysis of the Institutional review reports uses the headings set out in Annex H of the *Handbook for institutional review: Wales* (2003) to subdivide the Summary, Main report and Findings sections of the Institutional review reports into broad areas. An example from the Main report is 'The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision'.

For each published report, the text is taken from the report published on QAA's website and converted to a word processing format. The resulting files are checked for accuracy and coded into sections following the template used to construct the Institutional review reports. The reports are then introduced into a qualitative research software package, QSR NVIVO 8[®]. The software provides a wide range of tools to support indexing and searching and allows features of interest to be coded for further investigation.

A review team's judgements, its identification of features of good practice, and its recommendations appear at two points in an Institutional review report: the Summary and at the end of the Findings; it is only in the latter, however, that cross references to the paragraphs in the Main report are to be found, and it is here that the grounds for identifying a feature of good practice, offering a recommendation and making a judgement are set out. These cross references have been used to locate features of good practice and recommendations to the particular sections of the report to which they refer.

Individual *Outcomes...* papers are compiled by current and former QAA staff and experienced institutional reviewers. To assist in compiling the papers, reports produced by QSR NVIVO 8[®] are made available to authors to provide a broad picture of the overall distribution of features of good practice and recommendations in particular areas, as seen by the review teams.

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