

Outcomes from Institutional review in Wales

Part one: Institutions' quality frameworks and arrangements for programme approval, monitoring and review



Sharing good practice

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ISBN 978 1 84979 031 4

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Overall summary

Consideration of the 12 Institutional review reports published between October 2004 and August 2009 suggests that for the most part institutions of higher education in Wales had appropriate and effective arrangements in place for the oversight of quality and standards and for programme approval, monitoring and review.

All the review reports commented on the quality frameworks adopted by institutions in Wales. These frameworks included oversight by senior deliberative committees, roles for senior executive officers, and specific roles adopted by academic units, for example faculties, schools and departments. Good practice was identified in a range of areas, including strategic and resource planning; leadership on specific strategic matters, and the activities of particular committees. A number of reports made recommendations regarding the strengthening of institutions' oversight of quality and standards, particularly in relation to practices for upward reporting from academic units to central committees. The reports frequently commented upon the balance between deliberative and executive authority within institutions, and upon measures to avoid conflicts of interest within decision-making processes.

The review reports indicated that for the most part institutions in Wales had effective systems for approving new programmes of study or making amendments to existing programmes, with consideration of the business case for a programme conducted separately from consideration of its academic merits. Where new collaborative programmes were considered there were frequently additional requirements. Institutions were found to make careful efforts to ensure that programmes were in line with sector-wide expectations about quality and standards, through the use of external advisers, and a range of reference points including QAA's Academic Infrastructure. Institutions were found to provide support for the smooth operation of such processes.

In terms of the annual monitoring of the operation of programmes of study, the picture identified by the review reports was mixed. Almost all institutions were found to have systems for monitoring their provision on an annual basis, taking into account a range of factors including student feedback, progression and completion data, and the views of external examiners. In a number of cases, however, variability was found in the operation of such systems across an institution, particularly with regard to the accuracy and completeness of reporting and the consideration of reports. A number of recommendations were made to review and revise practices and procedures in this area.

Almost all institutions were found to have arrangements for reviewing their provision every five or six years, on the basis of individual programmes, or groups of programmes within an academic unit. Most institutions also operated interim review processes. The reports made comments on the timeliness with which institutions reviewed their provision and considered the findings of such processes, and also commented upon the membership of panels conducting reviews. Two features of good practice were identified in connection with the make-up of panels conducting reviews, while other reports noted the care with which institutions had handled the withdrawal of programmes.

Outcomes from Institutional review in Wales

The use of external advisers in processes for programme approval, monitoring and review was widespread across institutions in Wales, and the reports noted the care with which such advisers were deployed. The reports also identified a number of areas where an improved use of external advisers could be made in relation to programme approval, modification and review.

The review reports indicated that institutions in Wales generally had arrangements at both institutional and local levels to consider the reports emanating from external bodies conducting review procedures. Institutions drew out and disseminated good practice and matters of wider concern from such reports, and provided support for accreditation procedures.

The findings of this paper align well with the findings of the *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' quality frameworks and arrangements for programme approval, monitoring and review: introduction and general overview

1 This paper is based on a review of the outcomes of the 12 Institutional review reports published between October 2004 and August 2009 (see Appendix 1, page 21). A note on the methodology used to produce this and other papers in this series can be found at Appendix 2 (page 22).

2 This paper considers a number of the areas covered in the review reports, including:

- the institution's framework for managing quality and academic standards
- internal approval, monitoring and review processes
 - programme approval
 - annual monitoring
 - periodic review
- external participation in internal review processes
- programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies.

3 QAA's guidance to its review teams advised them to describe the institution's framework for managing academic quality and standards, including that for collaborative provision. Teams were asked to describe how authority was distributed among committee structures and more widely, how this was documented and how it aligned with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), published by QAA. Teams were asked to conclude whether the framework was appropriate for managing quality and standards.

4 For internal approval procedures, review teams were advised to outline the procedures, the use made of the *Code of practice* and other elements of the Academic Infrastructure, and the use of external participants. Teams were then asked to consider the accuracy of the institution's view, as expressed in the self-evaluation document, and how far procedures were effective, in alignment with the *Code of practice* and the extent to which an institutional overview was provided. For annual monitoring and periodic review, teams were also asked to consider how activities were monitored, loops were closed and appropriate consistency achieved. Teams were prompted to consider how collaborative provision was dealt with in all cases.

5 Under the heading external participation in review processes, review teams were asked to recount the institution's view of the use of external input and to determine the extent to which this view was accurate, the extent to which arrangements worked and were consistent, and to conclude whether the use of such experts was 'strong and scrupulous'. For programme-level review by external agencies, teams were advised to outline any trends in the reports of such agencies and the institution's processes for responding to them. They were also asked to consider how appropriate and timely the responses were, the extent to which they contributed to the assurance of quality and standards and how any major criticisms were dealt with. Finally, teams were asked to conclude whether an appropriate institutional oversight was maintained.

Features of good practice

6 Consideration of the published Institutional review reports shows the following features of good practice relating to the topics discussed in this paper:

Frameworks for quality and standards

- 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]
- good strategic planning in general and, in particular, with regard to the College's mission and the needs of national bilingualism [Trinity College, Carmarthen, paragraph 190 i; paragraphs 24, 27, 73, 137, 145 and 161]
- the integration of financial and academic planning through the work of the Planning Group in the Planning Round [University of Wales, Aberystwyth, paragraph 103 i; paragraph 21]
- the integration of academic planning with transparent resource distribution, both of which clearly support the implementation of the institution's Strategic Plan [University of Wales, Bangor, paragraph 91 i; paragraph 9]
- the use of Task Groups and Task and End Groups to provide focused and expeditious discussion of UWB business [University of Wales, Bangor, paragraph 91 ii; paragraph 11]
- the full and demonstrable commitment to the Welsh language and Welsh culture with the Welsh Medium Task Group/Grŵp Tasg Cyfrwng-Cymraeg, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Welsh Medium), providing effective and energetic leadership in this area [University of Wales, Bangor, paragraph 91 iii; paragraph 12]
- the close working relationship and effective liaison between the Teaching and Learning Group and the Quality Assurance Task Group, which provides for effective and coordinated oversight of the operation and development of UWB's provision [University of Wales, Bangor, paragraph 91 iv; paragraph 20]

Programme approval

- the rigour of the scheme (programme) approval and departmental review processes [University of Wales, Aberystwyth, paragraph 103 ii; paragraphs 23 and 28]
- the integration of programme development with strategic and resource planning [Cardiff University, paragraph 201 (third bullet point); paragraph 36]
- the development of an online database for the specification and approval of information on programmes and modules [Swansea University, paragraph 208 (second bullet point); paragraphs 39, 66 and 166]

Annual monitoring

- the widespread use of management information to inform discussion at all levels, together with the adoption of the Assessment Reports on the Quality of University Examinations and other data analysis tools [Swansea University, paragraph 208 (third bullet point); paragraphs 43, 94 to 96]

Periodic review

- the programme review process including the use of external and student representatives within the process [Trinity College, Carmarthen, paragraph 190 ii; paragraphs 57, 62 and 99]
- the rigour of the scheme (programme) approval and departmental review processes [University of Wales, Aberystwyth, paragraph 103 ii; paragraphs 23 and 28]
- the policy governing the closure of programmes of study which includes appropriate consultation with both staff and students and which protects the interests of students [University of Wales, Bangor, paragraph 91 v; paragraph 29]
- the development opportunities afforded to all academic staff through participation in scrutiny, validation and major review panels [Swansea Metropolitan University, paragraph 164 (first bullet point); paragraph 43].

Institutional frameworks for managing quality and standards

7 The Institutional review reports considered committee and management structures in institutions and how key policies and procedures relating to quality and standards were introduced, developed and implemented through these structures. The reports also examined the extent to which there was an integrated approach to the quality management, as well as the nature of the relationships between the executive and deliberative structures on the one hand and between central and local units such as faculties, schools, departments and programme teams on the other. For the most part, the reports concluded that the institutional frameworks were fit for purpose. Features of good practice were identified in five reports, including one where four examples of good practice were identified in this area. Recommendations were, however, made in relation to quality frameworks in nine reports.

8 In 2003 the majority of institutions in Wales awarded University of Wales' awards. At that time the University of Wales' own systems and processes were geared towards its responsibility for the standards of its awards, while member institutions were responsible for assuring quality, and consequently processes in partner institutions were often different. Following the institutional review of the University of Wales and subsequent independent 'Wigley Report' on the future and structure of the University, it underwent a fundamental change in September 2007 from a federal to a confederal structure and now operates under a confederation of independent institutions. This restructuring changed the relationships between the University and its member institutions. In particular, responsibilities for the standards of University of Wales' awards and for the quality of programmes leading to them were devolved to the institutions. Although not a legal requirement, the change in structure also enabled individual institutions to secure their own degree awarding powers. This development

led to further changes, including alterations to various aspects of individual institutions' own quality arrangements, and in some cases this will entail awarding their own degrees.

9 As described in the review reports, the frameworks for quality assurance adopted by institutions in Wales were broadly similar. The senior academic authority of the institution, for example, Senate or Academic Board, either held responsibility for quality and standards directly or devolved its oversight to a dedicated committee or to a group of committees. For example, in one institution, the Senate, as the academic authority, had devolved to an overall advisory committee the specific remit to set policy in relation to quality and standards and for learning and teaching activities. The precise configuration of such deliberative fora, however, varied between institutions. Responsibility for particular matters to do with quality and standards was sometimes devolved to separate committees or subcommittees, and examples were noted of committees dedicated to the oversight of research and research degrees; learning and teaching; quality enhancement; and collaborative provision. In a few cases institutions had established a separate committee to provide the means for its regulatory framework to be kept under review.

10 Academic planning was sometimes overseen by a central committee, or was the responsibility of an executive group. In a number of cases the review reports noted positively the integration of quality assurance with academic planning. In one case this was achieved through an annual planning round [University of Wales, Aberystwyth, paragraph 21], while in another the report found that the integration of academic planning with a resource distribution model was transparent and fully debated across the institution, in support of the strategic plan [University of Wales, Bangor, paragraph 9].

11 Good practice was also found in the institutional leadership provided by senior committees or groups with specific responsibilities. One review report found that a Learning and Teaching Panel, responsible for strategy in this area, acted as 'a forum for the sharing of good practice in the development of learning and teaching practice within academic schools and as a source of stimulus for such developments', and went on to describe the approach taken as 'enthusiastic and professional' and its strategic work as 'effective' [University of Wales, Newport, paragraph 28]. Other reports found good practice in the leadership provided for Welsh medium activities. In response to a national strategy, sector-wide coordination and support for teaching through the medium of Welsh was provided through the work of the University of Wales' Board for Welsh Medium Teaching, and the work of the Welsh Medium Teaching Development Unit [University of Wales, paragraph 46]. Another report noted the effective support provided by a Welsh Medium Task Group, under the energetic leadership of a Pro Vice-Chancellor, and the engagement of the Executive in supporting initiatives in this area [University of Wales, Bangor, paragraph 12]. Elsewhere, good practice was found in one institution's planning for strategic change, where staff and governors had been fully engaged, and where changes reflected the institution's mission, and the needs of national bilingualism [Trinity College, Carmarthen, paragraphs 24 and 27].

12 Many of the review reports also discussed the role of executive officers or bodies in quality assurance frameworks. Alongside committee structures, institutions had identified key individuals who led the management of quality and standards; most typically a Pro Vice-Chancellor with a specific quality assurance and enhancement or learning and teaching role. Below this, Deans, or officers at faculty or school levels, also played a significant role in providing academic leadership. In one example, the institution identified the Deans as having an integral part in institutional quality assurance procedures, through their membership of institutional committees, their responsibility for chairing of processes such as school audits and periodic reviews, and through their monitoring of quality procedures in schools. Several reports identified a dual role for officers at this level, in providing leadership for faculties and in their membership of Academic Board or senior executive groups.

13 Some review reports outlined the responsibilities for quality and standards which were held by faculties, schools and departments. One report noted how programmes were monitored and evaluated by schools, whose findings were reported to the relevant faculty. Another described an explicit three-tier structure for assuring standards and quality at corporate, faculty and school level. This was combined with cross-membership of key committees, thus helping to make more explicit the roles of the committees and the links between them across the whole institution. There were examples of the committee structure at institutional level being replicated or aligned as far as possible at the local level.

14 A considerable number of the reports, however, made recommendations in relation to institutions' ability to take an oversight of the quality assurance activities of academic units. In some cases these concerned relationships between faculty or school-level committees and those central committees charged with oversight of quality and standards. In one case, where there was considerable and varied delegation of quality assurance responsibilities to schools irrespective of their size, and where school boards were not accountable to institutional level committees, the report recommended that the institution 'consider the need for accountability to the Senate of school-level committees, in the context of the [institution's] framework for the management of academic quality and standards'. In other cases, variations in reporting between academic units and central committees were thought to hinder institutional oversight. In one instance it appeared that relationships between committees at institutional and faculty level were not always clearly understood by staff and that it was difficult to confirm a consistently effective oversight of those activities delegated to faculty level, in part because of inconsistencies in upward reporting and in the consideration of documentation. The report recommended the institution ensure greater transparency in its institutional oversight of quality assurance outcomes. In another instance, the limitations of reporting from committees at a local level, and from quality assurance processes, resulted in a recommendation to establish deliberative structures and management systems to ensure the effective and consistent oversight and management of quality and standards.

15 Examples were identified of the care taken to ensure that responsibilities for the oversight of quality assurance did not conflict or overlap with responsibilities for course development and management. In one case this was achieved through the use of an

audit and review committee. Elsewhere, activity was monitored through the parallel consideration of matters by Teaching and Learning and Quality Assurance Task Groups, thus providing confidence that limitations were identified and that effective mechanisms existed to address them. The review report stressed how, in its view, the efficiency and assiduity of these two groups working side-by-side had brought to light more variability of practice than would have emerged otherwise [University of Wales, Bangor, paragraph 20]. However, one report noted the possibility of conflicts of interest where a small number of senior staff were relied upon to chair validation and review panels, as well as chairing the committees that would consider panels' subsequent reports. The training of a further cohort of senior staff (for example heads of school) to chair such panels and working groups was recommended.

16 One review report noted some lack of formality in a committee structure where 'staff were unclear about how the responsibilities of committees interrelated' and in the case of a particular committee there was 'uncertainty as to how inputs from other committees informed [its] developmental agenda'. The report also noted duplication in the work of a project group with that of a deliberative committee, and recommended the introduction of 'greater formality into the operation of the committee system', particularly with regard to reporting and communicating between committees and to ensuring that subgroups had 'a clear remit, line of responsibility and timescale for reporting'.

17 The balance between executive and deliberative authority within institutions also drew comment in the review reports. In one case, good practice was found in the use of 'Task and End Groups' which involved 'effective liaison with the Executive, and the provision of an effective mechanism for informed debate and expeditious despatch of the institution's business' [University of Wales, Bangor, paragraph 11]. In another case, however, the report considered that the locus of responsibility for quality at Pro Vice-Chancellor level was implicit rather than explicit, and that as there was no dedicated quality unit 'a rather reactive stance to quality issues' might result. The report recommended that the institution should 'review its management of the quality agenda to enable it to adopt a more proactive stance'. In a further case, an institution was urged to keep under review the balance between its collegial and consensual approach and executive action so that timely responses to a changing environment were not unduly hindered, but at the same time to ensure greater engagement with quality within and between schools.

18 Several other review reports referred to steps taken by institutions to ensure greater engagement of academic staff with quality assurance matters. Examples were given of specific faculty board meetings or 'task and end' groups or other sub-groups to provide focused and timely discussion on quality assurance and resources. Other reports referred to the need to ensure that the framework, however appropriate it might be, was well understood by staff; this could include improved use of the committee structure as a mechanism for sharing information and for broadening staff awareness and experience. One report recommended the institution 'monitor the operation of its task groups to ensure that the system of appointment on grounds of specific expertise does not limit wider participation by both staff and students in the deliberative processes of the institution'.

19 Quality-related documentation was discussed in a number of the review reports. Several examples were given of the value of centrally provided documentation detailing procedures and processes, usually but not exclusively in the form of a single Quality Manual. Some reports, however, noted opportunities for improvements in this area. In one instance the absence of a collective set of regulations directly addressing the requirements for assessment and its management was seen to have the potential to hinder staff awareness of the institution's expectations in this area, while in another a review of quality regulations had not been completed following the assumption of responsibility for standards. In a further instance a quality handbook was found to be advisory rather than mandatory. Other reports discussed the documentation generated by deliberative committee systems and one recommended that steps be taken to ensure the timely circulation of committee papers and minutes and of the clear identification of planned actions, responsibilities and deadlines. Another noted that a terse style of minutes, combined with the degree of latitude permitted in institutional procedures and with variability in the reporting practices between faculties could make it difficult for central committees to maintain oversight.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Programme approval

20 The Institutional review reports indicated that institutions in Wales had, for the most part, rigorous systems for the approval of new programmes, and for amendments to be made to existing provision. These processes had been subject to significant change in a number of institutions. Three reports identified features of good practice in this area, while four reports made recommendations.

21 The review reports demonstrated that most institutions had a multi-stage process for approving new programmes of study, with new proposals normally originating from departments, schools or faculties and being subjected to initial consideration for strategic and resource implications. Proposals were given consideration by one or more validation committees, the first usually restricted to members of the institution, the second usually containing external members. Aside from core considerations of the quality and standards of the proposed programmes, consideration was given to matters such as assessment practices, entry requirements, student support arrangements, staffing levels, and the contribution of research to the curriculum. Upon recommendation by the validation panel, final approval was usually the responsibility of a senior deliberative committee. There were, however, some variations, with the usefulness of filtering processes before formal approval or validation, for example through scrutiny by the chair of an institutional committee, or through consideration by the quality unit, being noted. In some cases additional requirements were noted for the approval of programmes delivered through collaborative partners.

22 The review reports noted that strategic considerations were taken into account in the operation of programme approval procedures, most often by the executive or by faculty boards. Several reports noted requirements to consult widely and consider external viewpoints during the process of curriculum design. One report identified as a feature of good practice the requirement that schools proposing programmes should consult widely; with registry and with directorates for student support,

planning and information services, with heads of other schools involved, and with public relations and communications [Cardiff University, paragraph 36]. Another report found that proposals were circulated by means of a shared electronic folder to allow interested parties a chance to comment, and the approval process involved consultation with contributing faculties and a central support unit.

23 In terms of assuring that programme proposals met sector-wide expectations of standards and quality, almost all the review reports noted institutional requirements for programme proposal documentation to refer to various reference points, among which were the subject benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* and the *Code of practice*. The use of programme specifications was discussed in a number of reports. In one case the production of such specifications was sometimes found to be a condition of approval at the end of the validation process, rather than part of the submission to the panel. The report suggested that specifications should be part of the required submission to aid programme teams in aligning 'module outcomes, assessment requirements and overall programme expectations'.

24 A further route by which institutions assured themselves that the standards and quality of proposed programmes were comparable with those of other institutions in the UK was through the participation in approval procedures of persons with no involvement in the development or future management of the programme. These included members of other departments in the same institution, and persons external to the institution itself. The latter were usually academics, although sometimes other groups were also represented, including employers, current and former students and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). Some review reports also noted the presence of panel members from, or acting on behalf of, the University of Wales. One report found the rigour of the programme approval process to be a feature of good practice, and noted particularly the significant role of external assessors [University of Wales, Aberystwyth, paragraph 23]. A number of reports pointed to opportunities for improvements in the deployment of external advisers, including the use of employers in programme and curriculum design and in the approval of continuing professional development modules that carried the award of academic credit.

25 In addition to recommending the approval or non-approval of proposed programmes, validation panels could also make recommendations to the proposing department. Where these were considered especially important, approval could be conditional upon their fulfilment. The role of the external advisers in monitoring conditions of approval set by validation panels was noted in several review reports. One observed that documentation from such panels did not always meet institutional expectations, and, in particular, responses from external assessors were variable. Evidence was sometimes lacking that conditions of approval had been completed to the satisfaction of the external assessor, as required by the institution's procedures. The report recommended that the institution address these matters. Another report noted that the institution had identified that a number of conditions were not being met before the deadline for meeting them had passed and found that it was 'important that vigilance is maintained and that [the] meeting of conditions continues to be monitored and any required actions taken'.

26 Some review reports noted 'fast-track' arrangements for programme approval; in one instance the report identified a need for the institution to develop criteria for the application of a rapid approval process. The reports also sometimes noted the existence of separate processes for making minor amendments to existing programmes, or for the withdrawal and closure of programmes or modules. In one institution, where responsibility for approving minor amendments to programmes or some new modules lay at faculty level, it was found that consultation with an external examiner or other external subject specialist was not a prerequisite. The report recommended that the institution 'review procedures for the input of external subject expertise into approval at faculty level of new modules'. In another case it was found that amendments had been approved by faculties retrospectively against the institution's requirements.

27 The review reports also noted a number of methods to support the smooth operation of programme approval processes, such as the provision of quality handbooks, codes of practice and pro formas, the provision of advice and guidance by quality units, staff development activities and monitoring by a senior deliberative committee or the quality unit. In one case it was suggested that coverage in the handbook might be reviewed to ensure consistency of approval processes across the institution. In another case the potential burden of programme approval procedures in a 'market-led' environment was to be alleviated by senior administrative appointments and flexibility in the validation schedule. The significance of appropriate information systems was highlighted in a number of reports. Good practice was found in one institution's development of an online database for programme specifications which allowed proposals to be tracked and viewed by all staff, including external assessors [Swansea University, paragraph 39].

Annual monitoring

28 While most of the Institutional review reports found institutions' arrangements for the annual monitoring of their programmes were effective, recommendations were made in seven cases, including a number calling for significant review of and revisions to the operation of such processes. A feature of good practice was identified in one report.

29 As described in the review reports, the monitoring of programmes operated in a similar way across most of the institutions in Wales. Usually, a written report was constructed annually at programme level, based on a range of evidence and often using an institutional pro forma. Actions from the previous year were reported upon, and an action plan for the current year was outlined. Reports from individual modules or programmes were then considered at departmental, school or faculty level and feedback was provided to the programme team. A synoptic report summarising the findings for all programmes in the school or faculty was then forwarded, either directly or indirectly, for consideration to a senior deliberative committee. Reports for programmes provided collaboratively were sometimes included in this process.

30 The information used to support monitoring was considered in a number of review reports. This included, but was not restricted to, module reports and evaluations by students and staff, statistical data regarding progression and

completion, external examiners' reports, and, where appropriate to the nature of the programme, input from employers and from PSRBs. While some review reports noted the careful consideration of these sources, variability within institutions was also identified. In one case it was found that the quality of annual programme reviews ranged from an evaluative approach that took account of a range of different sources, to weaker examples that lacked real analysis, missed information and did not always report on actions. Another report noted wide variations in the use of progression, retention and completion data, in the use of external examiners' reports, and in the gathering of student feedback. The report recommended that the institution review the format of its documentation to ensure that more consistent information was communicated at all levels.

31 In the context of annual monitoring, one review report noted that the use of management information software allowed staff to analyse progression and completion data and to consider student progress and achievement. This and the widespread use of management information was regarded as a feature of good practice [Swansea University, paragraph 43]. However, other reports indicated a variability in the datasets provided from the centre to programmes for inclusion in monitoring reports, and in one case these were described as being of limited value as they did not necessarily include resit results and were not always well analysed.

32 The review reports found that it was common practice to include in annual monitoring reports an evaluation of progress against last year's action plan, and an action plan for the coming year. However, some variability within institutions was also found in the use of such plans. In one case, where such variability was encountered, the report suggested that the institution review the manner in which action plans arising from annual monitoring and periodic review were drawn up and monitored, in order to ensure a transparent and coherent follow-up.

33 External views were considered in the course of annual monitoring, in part as a guarantee that such reporting was comprehensive and accurate. One review report noted the existence of a faculty subgroup, which included external members, to audit the monitoring process and review the monitoring reports, and which had the authority to require changes to the Dean's summary before submission and to make recommendations for improvements to the process. Another report, however, found that the annual monitoring process relied on a detailed analysis by a single senior member of staff to confirm the accuracy of summary reports and lacked an external view at the intermediate levels. The same report found that there was a tendency to emphasise the positive at the expense of the negative in aggregate reports. In this case the report recommended that the institution review and revise its annual monitoring process to enhance its robustness and improve its effectiveness.

34 It is widely accepted that the timely submission of annual monitoring reports allows proper consideration at the various levels of the institution. A number of review reports noted difficulties in the timely collation and consideration of reports. In one case, monitoring was conducted on a triennial basis, and when coupled with a delay in the consideration of summary reports, this meant that a whole cohort of students could have passed through before the institution was assured of the quality and standards of programmes. In another case, the report noted that many annual

programme reviews had not been submitted by the deadline, or before both school and generic overview reports had been produced. However, in another case, it was noted that the relevant committee met twice in order to ensure that all reports were considered.

35 The review reports also commented on the consideration of monitoring and synoptic reports by individual committees. Two reports commented on careful deliberations at institutional level, with one observing that consideration was 'robust and scrupulous with careful attention to identification of matters requiring remedial action as well as to points of good practice'. The other noted thorough scrutiny by a central committee, with some monitoring reports returned to schools for clarification where necessary. In another case, a robust response was noted where the level of reporting from one school fell below institutional requirements. Other reports identified full discussion at programme, school, faculty and institutional levels. However, there were also examples of variability within institutions in the consideration given to monitoring reports. One report found limited documentary evidence that annual monitoring reports were consistently considered and approved by programme committees and committees at school level received only a synoptic report and action plan rather than all programme-level reports, contrary to stated procedures. The review report considered that 'committee structures in the schools should be used as intended to ensure that each programme is properly evaluated and that the lessons learned are adequately shared...'. In a further case the report found that while detailed feedback was given to individual programmes, the overview of the reports tended to focus on procedural matters. This contributed to a recommendation on strengthening arrangements for taking an institutional overview of quality related matters.

36 The use of information from annual monitoring was sometimes considered in the review reports. In one case, an institutional overview of annual monitoring was returned to faculty boards, in order to ensure that the points raised were effectively addressed at school and programme level. In another case a feedback report was produced for each school, including a generic report of good practice, which was then considered through the school committee structure. Two reports, however, recommended the development of systems to make use of the information gleaned from monitoring activities. In the first case, the report recommended the development of mechanisms at the institutional level to manage the dissemination of good practice and its monitoring and evaluation. The second report recommended that consideration be given to how good practice could be drawn out and disseminated, and how matters of concern or institutional importance could be identified and handled.

Periodic review

37 The Institutional review reports generally found that institutions' arrangements for the periodic review of their provision worked well. Features of good practice were identified in four reports, while recommendations were made in five reports.

38 The review reports demonstrated that periodic reviews were conducted variously of individual programmes, of academic units, or both. Most reviews involved the production of a self-evaluation document or similar reflection on the provision, and the consideration of various sources of information on academic performance (including programme specifications and curriculum maps, progression and

completion statistics, external examiners' reports, and student work). The panel of staff conducting reviews normally drew members from other academic units, and advisers external to the institution. The resulting periodic review report usually identified areas where remedial action was required, and areas of good practice for further dissemination, as well as making a recommendation on the future of the provision. This recommendation was usually forwarded to a senior committee/subcommittee charged with monitoring the results and the process. Some review reports discussed institutional arrangements for minor and major modifications to existing programmes or for the closure of programmes.

39 Most institutions were found to subject their provision to periodic review every five, or occasionally six, years. In addition, most also had arrangements for other cycles of audit or review, for example those focused on the operation of schools, departments or other units, or those focusing on cross-institutional themes, for example communications; in other cases subject reviews were conducted.

40 Two recommendations in the review reports related to the timescales associated with various forms of review. In one case the lengthening of the cycles of periodic review and quality progress reviews, when coupled with a delay in completion of the latter in some schools, was felt to reduce the certainty that all processes were fully operational, and introduced the possibility of matters not being identified for extended periods. The report recommended that the institution ensure that the cycles of review activity took place within the timeframes specified by its procedures. Another report noted an instance of scrutiny at programme level being deferred in the belief that the provision was unproblematic, while a contemporaneous subject review had noted concerns requiring an urgent response. The report took the view that careful planning of the various review cycles 'would be crucial to ensuring that they were mutually supportive processes...'

41 The membership of panels conducting reviews was subject to some comment in the review reports. Panels were sometimes chaired by a senior officer, either the Academic Registrar, a Pro Vice-Chancellor, or by other staff. One report noted that the chair and secretary remained constant across all internal audits, and found that 'their role is pivotal both in identifying variable and improvable practice at school level', and in ensuring the thoroughness with which audits were completed. One report found good practice in the development opportunities offered on a rota basis to all staff through participation in scrutiny, validation and review processes [Swansea Metropolitan University, paragraph 43]. However the reports also made recommendations, either to reduce burden or to avoid conflicts of interest. One report, for a small institution, recommended a broadening of the group of staff chairing quality assurance events. A similar recommendation was made where a review panel was found to be chaired by a Dean who, for the provision in question, had other responsibilities. In addition, several staff members on a different panel were found to be drawn from a restricted range of schools in a single faculty. By contrast, the presence of elected student representatives and external advisers on periodic review panels was identified as a feature of good practice in one case [Trinity College, Carmarthen, paragraphs 57 and 62]. In another case, the rigour of the process was identified as a feature of good practice, and the report noted particularly the effective use of external assessors [University of Wales, Aberystwyth, paragraph 28].

42 Sometimes the decision is taken to withdraw a programme, on the basis of periodic review or as part of an institutional process. One report commented positively on the management of the closure of programmes in a particular discipline and noted the formulation of an action plan, consideration of the closure at various levels of the institution, the information provided to students, and the actions taken to ensure that academic standards were maintained. Another report found good practice in an institution's approach to the closure of programmes, in the close consultation with students, the consideration of alternatives, (including transferral of students to another institution), and the institution's ability to ensure that interests of students were safeguarded [University of Wales, Bangor, paragraph 29].

43 The action plans drawn up in response to review processes were also discussed in a number of reports. In one case the report was unable to confirm that a comprehensive action plan had been compiled by one school, while in another school where audit and review processes had been combined there was some ambiguity about the extent to which the action plan reflected the details of the plan arising from periodic review. The same report also found that some key documents had no author or date recorded, which made it hard to judge how far procedures had been followed and at what stage documents had been updated. In this case the report recommended that the institution review the manner in which action plans were drawn up and monitored, and review key quality documentation for consistency of terminology, dates of issue and provenance.

44 For the most part, periodic review reports were considered by senior committees or their subgroups with responsibility for quality and standards. In one case it was found that the senior bodies responsible for monitoring all such action plans were not, in fact, doing so. The review report recommended that the institution take steps to ensure 'effective and consistent institutional oversight in relation to these matters'. A further report, however, noted how the institution's processes enabled it to identify matters of concern in a timely manner, as shown in the production and publication of a paper on Learning Outcomes, and the production of a 'self-critical and [reflective] paper summarising the lessons which had been learned from [internal quality audits] over a two year period'.

External participation in internal review processes

45 The Institutional review reports considered the use made of input by external persons into programme approval and periodic review processes; while there were no features of good practice other than those already identified, the reports generally demonstrated that institutions made strong and scrupulous use of such external participation and valued it highly. Recommendations were, however, made in six reports.

46 For the most part institutions made use of external views in processes for curriculum design, for the approval and validation of new programmes, for annual monitoring and for review and revalidation. These views were normally sought from staff from the same institution but from outside the academic unit responsible for the provision, and also from those external to the institution. A number of reports made reference to the use of representatives of the University of Wales. Views were usually sought from external subject specialists and those with a wide experience of higher

education more generally. The representatives of other groups were also sometimes involved, including students and employers, or PSRBs. The views of external examiners were usually sought in relation to minor modifications to programmes or the approval of modules, as well as in programme monitoring processes most usually through consideration of their reports. External persons were sometimes included on institutional committees.

47 A number of review reports referred to explicit criteria for the nomination of external advisers or assessors and the effective tracking of nominations to ensure range and objectivity. In one institution, which made extensive use of external representation to support its quality processes, the report found that external assessors received limited guidance as to their role in programme and module approval and that their reports were variable in coverage. It was recommended that the way in which external assessors were informed of their role in programme approval should be reviewed, and reporting requirements should be clarified.

48 The review reports made other recommendations where gaps were identified in the use of external input or to ensure alignment between what was laid down in documentation and established practice. In one institution, it was found that external specialists were not always present in annual review board of study meetings despite being appointed for such a role, and that in processes for module approval or for the incorporation of study conducted abroad into a diet of study, external advice might be provided solely by an external member of the faculty board. In another case, where the advice and views of employers and graduates were not frequently sought, the report recommended that the institution 'develop more consistent approaches to the formal involvement of [these groups] in the design, validation and review of programmes'. In a school-based approach to review, in which it was necessary that a range of disciplines be represented on the panel, no external specialist was present to cover the subject of Welsh. While accepting this was an isolated case, the report recommended that where a broad range of subject areas were brought together for a single periodic review the institution draw upon a sufficient range of external expertise, to ensure that all discipline areas were adequately covered.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

49 The Institutional review reports considered institutions' engagement with the reports of external bodies and the extent to which these made a positive contribution to the assurance of quality and standards. For the most part it was concluded that institutions engaged fully with external agencies, although two reports made recommendations in this area.

50 Institutions in Wales have a wide variety of engagements with external bodies conducting reviews at institutional or programme levels, including QAA, the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales (Estyn), and a range of PSRBs. The review reports focused on the institutional consideration of the reports of these bodies, the monitoring of actions taken as a result of them, and the extraction and dissemination of points for wider consideration and examples of good practice. The reports also considered the support provided to academic departments in gaining accreditation of provision from PSRBs.

51 The review reports indicated that for the most part, institutions ensured that the reports emanating from engagements with PSRBs were considered by deliberative committees at institutional or faculty level and that action plans were carefully monitored. In an exceptional case it was recommended that the institution establish 'a comprehensive and active appraisal of all the lessons to be learnt from external reviews'. Elsewhere, the practice of having an overview committee to consider PSRB reports was noted as an effective source of guidance and expertise on applications for accreditation. An important element of this consideration is the identification of learning points or good practice more widely applicable in the institution, and one report considered that the institution's committee could do more in this regard.

52 The consideration of matters related to external bodies or their reports was often found to be incorporated into quality assurance procedures, for example in curriculum design and in programme approval. One review noted how approval procedures could be adapted to facilitate joint events with PSRBs. Other reports noted the consideration of PSRB accreditation in monitoring processes or through internal quality audits, and requirements to report on action plans and feedback through monitoring and review procedures. The reports also noted examples of institutional support for relationships with PSRBs, including central records of accreditation links and the provision of guidance in preparing for accreditation, or for programme-level reviews. In the one case cited where accreditation had not been achieved, the report noted that the faculty was addressing the outstanding requirements of the professional body, and that the provision had also been subject to an internal periodic review.

53 The review reports indicated that institutions made appropriate responses to external reports. One review report noted that 'the detailed planning contained in the formal response to [a particular report] enabled the team to conclude that the engagement had strengthened the [institution's] assurance of quality and standards'. The reports of external bodies were considered useful, and in a number of cases had led to improvements. In one case, PSRB recommendations were seen by the institution to have contributed to planning, for example in changing the level of programmes offered or in contributing to strategic planning in estates and staffing levels, and also that engagement with external review and accreditation processes provided valuable opportunities for the institution 'to review and benchmark itself and its provision against other relevant national and international benchmarks and standards'.

Conclusions and comparative review

54 The Institutional review reports found that, during the period covered by this paper, most institutions in Wales had effective frameworks for the management of academic quality and standards, and for approval, monitoring and review.

55 The findings of this paper align well with those of the *Outcomes from institutional audit* papers on:

- Institutions' frameworks for managing quality and academic standards
- Validation and approval of new provision, and its periodic review
- Programme monitoring arrangements
- Institutions' work with employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

56 The review reports identified strength in institutional frameworks for the management of quality and standards in terms of the integration of strategic direction and resource allocation with the management of quality. This also extended to initiatives to support Welsh-medium teaching as part of an overall strategic approach, as well as to close relationships between various teaching and learning groups. In common with the *Outcomes from institutional audit* papers on 'Institutions' frameworks for managing quality and academic standards' this paper identifies examples of key senior personnel driving forward the quality agenda. The use of task groups and task and end groups was highlighted in a number of Institutional reviews. A number of reports made recommendations with regard to upward reporting from academic units and quality assurance processes to central committees in order to improve institutional oversight. Papers in both series also identify examples of administrative support and documentation and note the comments made on the balance of powers between executive and deliberative bodies and on the definition of responsibility for quality assurance.

57 This paper demonstrates that, for the most part, institutions in Wales had robust systems for the approval of new programmes. In common with its counterpart for England and Northern Ireland this paper demonstrates that institutions generally ensured that new provision was assessed against national reference points, and that approval processes included an element of external scrutiny, although recommendations were made in this respect. Both papers also note the efforts made by institutions to support the smooth operation of such systems. It is also evident that monitoring of conditions of approval has sometimes proved challenging in Wales as in England and Northern Ireland.

58 While the Institutional review reports noted the contribution of programme monitoring to institutions' quality arrangements, it is noticeable that the number of reports that identified good practice was outweighed by the number that made recommendations in this area. This echoes closely the findings of the *Outcomes from institutional audit* papers on the same subject. In particular, papers in both series note comments in reports upon the variability of reporting, the use of progression and completion data, the filtering of information, and the dissemination of good practice.

59 Institutions' arrangements for periodic review were found to be broadly effective. While strength was identified in some institutions' use of external advisers in such processes, some reports found opportunities to broaden their use. Both this paper and that drawing on the Institutional audit reports identify examples of variable practice with respect to the scheduling of reviews and the development of action plans and upward reporting. Two examples of carefully worked out approaches to the closure of programmes were identified in the review reports.

60 The use of external advisers in programme approval and review processes was widespread among institutions in Wales, most of whom had systems to support their appointment and induction. As in the papers for England and Northern Ireland, this paper notes where recommendations were made to reduce variability in the appointment or deployment of external specialists, or where there were opportunities to draw representatives from other groups.

61 Institutions in Wales had, for the most part, effective systems for the consideration of reports from PSRBs and other external bodies. Like their counterparts in England and Northern Ireland, institutions generally ensured that a senior deliberative body considered the reports from such interactions. Institutions generally also provided a degree of support to academic departments in their interactions with PSRBs. Recommendations were sometimes made to improve the oversight taken of such engagements, or to improve the use made of the information deriving from them.

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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