



# Higher Education Review: Wales of the University of South Wales

April - May 2015

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review: Wales conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of South Wales. The review took place from 27 April to 1 May 2015 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Dr David Houlston
- Dr Ann Read
- Professor Ian Robinson
- Dr David Wright
- Mr Mark Napier (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the University of South Wales and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code)<sup>1</sup> setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review: Wales the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of threshold academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>2</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review: Wales](#)<sup>3</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code).

<sup>2</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus).

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Review: Wales web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/reviewsandreports/pages/higher-education-review-wales.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/reviewsandreports/pages/higher-education-review-wales.aspx).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about the University of South Wales

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the University of South Wales.

- The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at the University of South Wales.

- The provision of high-quality, focused and accessible guidance on the recognition of prior learning for employers and applicants (Expectation B6).
- The role of University Link Officers in the support of current collaborative partnership operations (Expectation B10).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to the University of South Wales.

By October 2015:

- ensure that appropriate and effective representation mechanisms are used to engage with all postgraduate research students (Expectation B5)
- make more systematic and effective use, at school level and above, of the University's academic processes and monitoring procedures so as to ensure that its policies and practices are consistently applied (Expectation B6)
- ensure that external examiners' reports are routinely and transparently available to students (Expectation B7)
- review its Due Diligence Policy and procedures to ensure that it scrutinises all organisations actually or potentially associated with provision leading to its awards (Expectation B10)
- ensure that all records of postgraduate research supervisor training are complete and fit for purpose (Expectation B11)
- ensure that all information for prospective and current students is consistently accurate and meets the University's minimum requirements (Expectation C)
- ensure that information published by partners and third-party organisations, about provision leading to University awards, is consistently fit for purpose and trustworthy (Expectation C).

By January 2016:

- ensure that all master's by research and professional doctorate courses are appropriately regulated within clearly defined awards frameworks (Expectation A2.1)

- ensure that a definitive record of every course and qualification, including taught or structured components of research awards, is current, approved and maintained (Expectation A2.2).

### **Affirmation of action being taken**

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that the University of South Wales is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The systematic mechanisms being developed to improve the timeliness and nature of assessment feedback across all University provision (Expectation B6).
- The actions being taken to develop and publish specific handbooks for all courses (Expectation C).

## About the University of South Wales

The University of South Wales (the University) was formed on 11 April 2013 through the merger of the University of Glamorgan (UoG) and the University of Wales, Newport (UWN). It is currently the largest university in Wales and the tenth largest in the UK. At the time of the formal merger it had 33,000 students and it aims to maintain a student population of at least 30,000. The University also has 788 academic staff and 1,399 support staff, a total headcount of 2,187 or 1,933 full-time equivalents.

The University is the head of a Group that includes the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD) and The College Merthyr Tydfil. Both are wholly owned subsidiary companies of the University. The RWCMD is the National Conservatoire of Wales and is a leading UK provider of specialist practical and performance-based training in music, drama and related professions. The College Merthyr Tydfil is described as 'a true community college', which 'makes a major impact on the economy of the Heads of the Valleys region', not least through involvement in the Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI) initiative.

The University's mission is 'to add value to lives, economies and communities through education, innovation and engagement that is inspiring, responsive, creative and professional'. Its vision is to be 'The University of choice in Wales and beyond for students, organisations and communities who value vocationally focused education and applied research which provides solutions to problems that affect society and the economy'. The University is committed to vocational education and applied research, and is proud to be 'known for our widening access and progression agenda within our local community along with our growing business and industrial links'.

The University is currently based on five campuses, in Pontypridd, Cardiff, Caerleon and Newport. It also has a London centre which has not recruited students and the future of the University's presence in London is under consideration. The University's academic provision is organised in four faculties: Business and Society; Computing, Engineering and Science; Creative Industries; and Life Sciences and Education.

The University has 6,141 students in provision offered with others. At the time of the review the University had 97 partnerships: 10 UK further education colleges; 29 other UK organisations; 15 overseas institutions delivering University awards; and 42 'other partnerships', mainly progression arrangements. It has formed a strategic alliance with five further education colleges in South Wales. The University is seeking to develop further international partnerships, and it intends that all such new arrangements would cover a range of academic disciplines, and would be likely to include educational provision and research.

Since the formal establishment of the University in April 2013, the University has been on what it describes as 'a merger journey' through which it is 'building on the heritage of both institutions'. During this period it has faced, and continues to face, the challenge of creating 'a common vision and culture' across the University 'through the adoption of one new consistent approach, across all our systems and processes'.

Key developments have included restructuring of faculties and schools, and the closure of its Caerleon Campus (a process to be completed in 2016).

The recommendations of the last reviews of the UoG and the UWN have been addressed. Some outcomes of these actions taken by the two previous universities have been subsumed within the processes of the present University, and some are still works in progress.

Issues in relation to one of the University's overseas collaborative partnerships were brought to QAA's notice immediately before this present review took place. QAA, through its Concerns Scheme, referred this matter to the present review, according to its procedure for referring concerns to reviews.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Referring concerns to reviews: [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Complaints](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Complaints).

## Explanation of the findings about the University of South Wales

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#) is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.

# 1 Judgement: The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards

**Expectation (A1):** In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:

**a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* are met by:**

- positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications
- ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications
- naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications
- awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes

**b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics**

**c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework**

**d) consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.**

**Quality Code, *Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards***

## Findings

1.1 The self-evaluation document states that the University's Framework for the Management of Academic Standards and Quality 2014-15 (the Framework) takes due regard of the Quality Code, *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW), and Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.2 The Framework states, as one of its core principles, that 'the academic standards of the awards of the University will articulate with those expressed in the CQFW [Credit Qualification Framework for Wales] and the FHEQ and be comparable to those of other UK universities'. Qualifications are listed in the regulations for taught courses and credit requirements for awards are also described in the regulations.

1.3 The Framework requires that all courses are developed taking into account all relevant internal and external points of reference, including the Quality Code and any professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB) expectations; supporting references points are included at the end of sub-sections of the Framework as a guide. The regulatory frameworks are explained in the Curriculum Design Guide, which makes references to European Qualification Frameworks. QAA guidance on qualification characteristics and the University's statement on compatibility with the European Credit Transfer System are included in the University's framework.



1.4 The Framework also requires that all approved courses are governed by formal course specifications, which include the course overall aims and learning outcomes. The process for course approval and reapproval requires consideration of the course's learning outcomes together with the relevant qualification descriptors, Subject Benchmark Statements and Qualifications Characteristics Statements and, where appropriate, the requirements of PSRBs.

1.5 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested the arrangements for ensuring appropriate alignment of awards with the FHEQ, the CQFW and Subject Benchmark Statements by reviewing: the University's regulations; processes for course approval, monitoring and review; validation and course monitoring documentation and reports; course specifications; module specifications; and external examiners' reports, and by meeting a range of staff.

1.6 The documentation viewed by the review team, and the discussion with staff, confirmed that the approval process requires course teams to demonstrate that the learning outcomes of courses and modules are at the appropriate level, and are effectively matched to the qualification descriptors in the FHEQ and CQFW, and that due account is taken of Subject Benchmark Statements, qualification characteristics, PSRB requirements and other external reference points. The standards of awards are confirmed in external examiners' reports.

1.7 The consideration of the documentation and discussions with staff confirmed that the provider employs the FHEQ, CQFW and Subject Benchmark Statements effectively in its published approval, review and assessment processes. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A2.1): In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards**

**Findings**

1.8 The University has two sets of comprehensive Academic Regulations: legacy regulations for students originally enrolled at the UWN, and the current University of South Wales Academic Regulations, which apply to all students registered from September 2013 and all students previously enrolled at the UoG. There is also a University-wide set of Research Regulations.

1.9 The current Academic Regulations are derived from the previous UoG regulations. They will be reviewed and updated in September 2016 to align with the outcomes of a comprehensive review of academic strategies. Until that time, the Academic and Research Regulations are updated regularly by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and Research Committee respectively, in response to matters raised by assessment boards, to ensure fitness for purpose. Amendments to regulations are approved by Academic Board.

1.10 Academic quality management procedures are codified in the Framework (paragraph 1.1), which includes discrete sections for taught, collaborative and research provision, and also in various codes of practice for research degrees. The Framework is comprehensively mapped to the UK Quality Code and describes the key processes used to assure the setting of standards. Courses and curricula are defined using standard course and module specifications.

1.11 A Student Charter is in place, and a more general set of student regulations and guidelines is used to signpost procedures such as appeals and complaints (see section B9), academic integrity, fitness to practise, and fitness to study.

1.12 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by scrutinising the various regulations and frameworks, by reading terms of reference for and records of committee meetings, and in meetings with staff and students.

1.13 The Regulations, Framework and codes of practice are readily available online from the University's Academic Standards and Quality Service website. Academic Board delegates responsibility to QAC for matters of minor derogation from the University standard assessment regulations where, exceptionally, external stakeholder requirements, such as PSRB standards, require it and the team heard that although such minor changes may also be permitted for courses delivered in partner institutions, the need had not yet arisen.

1.14 In its reading, the review team learned that operating two sets of parallel academic regulations had presented challenges to course teams, but appreciated that the UWN legacy regulations had only a limited lifetime remaining.

1.15 The detailed course specification template used by the University meets national expectations. Module specifications are appropriate and map assessment to learning outcomes. There is evidence that the Framework ensures planning teams engage properly with the appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements and FHEQ level descriptors. The

Curriculum Design Guide links the University's approach to curriculum design into the regulatory framework.

1.16 The review team also noted some overlap between the regulations for taught and research degrees, leading to a subsequent lack of clarity in the University's frameworks and regulations for research degrees in which elements of taught material are embedded.

1.17 Neither in its discussions with staff nor in its reading was the review team able to see whether the University's overarching model for professional doctorates aligned with the national descriptions within the CQFW, the FHEQ and the QAA qualification descriptors.

1.18 The Research Degree Regulations indicate that the University may award a number of different professional doctorates, although the review team learned that currently only the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) award is offered. While the promotional material and the University's course specification for the DBA indicate that the course aligns with the FHEQ, the lack of an overarching University description or framework for professional doctorate awards meant that the team was unable to confirm alignment for the other professional doctorates.

1.19 The regulations failed to make clear, in either master's by research, or professional doctorates, what contribution the taught element made to the overall assessment for the award. The regulations for taught master's awards indicate that such degrees will be classified, although the research degree regulations are silent on whether a master's by research, which might include taught elements, would also be classified. In discussions with staff it became clear that despite the ambiguity in the Regulations, these awards were not classified.

1.20 The review team also learned that the University intended new master's by research courses to comprise only a research project, removing any ambiguity regarding the contribution of taught components. However, the existing named MA and MSc research degrees containing taught elements would continue in approval if faculties wished. The team was told that these awards would have been approved at validation events, and the course structures would be described in course specifications. However, it was unable to find such descriptions on the Integrated Curriculum Information System (ICIS), the University's course database, or in the various research degree regulations and codes of practice. See also A2.2.

1.21 The University had itself acknowledged in 2013 that it should more clearly distinguish between the regulatory frameworks for taught and research master's degrees. Subsequent discussion indicated that this intention had not been followed through, and reinforced the review team's view that the University's academic community would benefit from greater clarity in its regulatory arrangements for research degrees containing elements of taught material. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University ensure that all master's by research and professional doctorate courses are appropriately regulated within clearly defined awards frameworks.

1.22 While the University has successfully overcome significant challenges in unifying two sets of academic regulations, and has developed a comprehensive regulatory framework that is largely fit for purpose, there remain some notable ambiguities and omissions in its regulations for research degrees that contain an assessed taught component. Therefore the review team concludes that, although overall the University's regulatory frameworks meet the Expectation, the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

**Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards**

**Findings**

1.23 The University's central database, ICIS, holds details of all standard taught provision from the course approval stage, through delivery, to closure. Course specifications detail the educational aims, learning outcomes and course structure. The FHEQ level is not stated in course specifications, but is implicit in the nature of the qualification which is mapped to the FHEQ through the regulations for taught courses. Module specifications include the credit level.

1.24 The course approval process documentation states that all taught courses must comply with the University's academic regulations for taught provision as well as taking account of the specific requirements of any PSRB. This documentation also includes details on the requirements for the structure of the courses, the content and the assessment strategy; the latter two are detailed in the module specifications. The process for updating the curriculum between validations is articulated in the course approval procedure. Approval is required at different levels depending on the nature of the change. Similar processes and documentation requirements apply to collaborative provision and are articulated in the Framework for Standards and Quality - Part B: Collaborative Provision.

1.25 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by scrutinising the course approval process documentation, which includes the processes for updating of definitive records between validations, validation documentation, course specifications, ICIS, course change documentation, and minutes of the QAC; and through meetings with staff.

1.26 The review team found that the processes for producing and updating course specifications for taught courses were well documented and generally worked effectively, and course specifications were included in student handbooks, where handbooks were available. The ICIS database holds all course specifications, except for those of RWCMD, which are held on the College's own record system. However, the ICIS database is not always up to date: some course specifications are recorded as 'not available' or are out of date; and the database does not include non-standard provision, for example professional doctorates. Course specifications for some research degrees with taught components were not available. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University ensure that a definitive record of every course and qualification, including taught or structured components of research awards, is current, approved and maintained.

1.27 Overall, the review team considers that the University has in place effective procedures for maintaining definitive records of taught courses and qualifications which constitute the reference point for delivery and assessment of courses, and their monitoring and review. The team concludes that the Expectation is met, but a moderate risk is posed by out-of-date or missing course specifications.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

**Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.28 The Framework for the Management of Academic Standards and Quality for all provision, the regulations for taught courses, and the procedures for course approval require the documentation of the proposed learning outcomes and the detailed scrutiny of the documentation during the course approval process. These procedures are designed to ensure that standards are set in accordance with the FHEQ, CQFW, and Subject Benchmark Statements, and that the proposals meet the University's own requirements and regulations. Arrangements for the approval of research programmes are detailed in the Framework section C and the Research Degree Regulations. The QAC oversees the validation schedule, and also the health of the portfolio (through the annual portfolio review).

1.29 Assessments are mapped against the module learning outcomes and the approval process checks that the learning outcomes are set at an appropriate level aligned to the FHEQ. Advice and guidance is provided on suitable assessment strategies and appropriate criteria to enable students to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes. All courses are approved for a maximum period of six years. The requirements of PSRBs are incorporated into course design where appropriate.

1.30 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by examining the University's standards and quality framework, the regulations, procedures, guidelines governing the approval processes and by reading validation documentation, reports of approval panels, committee minutes, and by talking to staff.

1.31 The documentation and discussions showed that the course approval process explicitly addressed alignment with the FHEQ, CQFW and Subject Benchmark Statements. The mechanisms for securing standards in the design and approval of courses are comprehensively documented and understood by staff. There is clear articulation between assessments strategies, learning outcomes and the level of award, with comprehensive guidance for staff to ensure that assessments are designed at an appropriate level.

1.32 The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.2): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:**

- **the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment**
- **both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.33 The University's policies and procedures for course approval, defined in the Framework, ensure the alignment of modules and courses with appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements, the FHEQ and CQFW, and thus secure threshold standards. The procedures also take account of PSRB requirements as appropriate. A Course Developer's Guide and a Course Design Guide support staff in the development of modules and courses, and promote consistency and parity of provision across the University. The planned implementation of a new Academic Blueprint for course design from 2015-16 aims to provide a standardised framework for the structure and design of bachelor's degree courses that will incorporate innovative learning approaches and enhanced employability experiences.

1.34 The course and module development and approval procedures also reinforce the significance of outcome-based assessment of learning within the academic curriculum at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Learning outcomes are specified at course and module levels, and mapped against UK threshold standards. Module and Course Handbooks are used to demonstrate how modules contribute to the achievement of the course learning outcomes alongside relevant assessment information.

1.35 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by examining reports, policies, procedures and the minutes of relevant committees. The team also met undergraduate and postgraduate students, and academic and support staff.

1.36 Through discussion with students and academics, the review team found that the style and content of course handbooks are variable. The University is in the process of reviewing its template for handbooks to promote greater consistency of information. (See also under C.) Students also have access to Assessment for Learning and Assessment Tariff documents that guide and promote their understanding of assessment demands and requirements, including opportunities for assessments to be completed and examined through the medium of the Welsh language.

1.37 Students' achievements of academic standards are scrutinised and moderated at undergraduate and postgraduate level by independent external examiners with relevant academic expertise. Where appropriate and necessary, representatives from PSRBs or accrediting organisations also provide expertise in assessing the progression and achievement of students. External examiners are required to attend the University's Subject and Award Assessment Boards to ensure parity and consistency in determining student progression and achievement. The QAC conducts a regular review of assessment policies and procedures, and action is taken where inconsistencies are identified or amendments required. A summary of external examiner reports for 2012-13 and 2013-14 revealed that a

small number of reports had not been submitted to the University by March of the following year and therefore could not be used to inform annual course monitoring.

1.38 Standards are monitored through annual module reviews and annual course reports. Annual module reviews are presented at Subject Assessment Boards when module profiles are being considered; this enables external examiners to consider and respond to the appropriate module reviews. Course Boards receive and consider a summary of annual course reports. (See also under A2.2 and B7.)

1.39 The review team found that overall, the University's procedures for course design and approval, and its regulations and procedures for assessment, secure the alignment of standards with UK threshold expectations. On this basis the team concluded that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.3): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.40 The University monitors the achievement of its own academic standards, and UK threshold standards, through the mechanisms of annual monitoring; interim reviews when considered necessary; and six-yearly review and revalidation of courses. The University expects that any standards issues in respect of student performance and course operation should be highlighted and discussed at assessment boards in the presence of external examiners, and should be included in the external examiners' report. Student performance data, based on key indicators, is provided online by the Student and Management Information Unit, and module leaders are expected to use it in their annual monitoring reports.

1.41 Course leaders organise annual course reviews, which look at all module reports, including those from collaborative partners' provision where relevant. In evaluating the course the course leader is required to take into account external examiners' reports at module and course level, student feedback, employer feedback (if relevant), and student statistical data to produce an evaluative report and action plan, identifying any standards issues. Internal benchmarking data is provided to the course leader as part of the course digest; this facilitates data comparisons over three-year periods or with faculty and University data. Deans or the Principal of the RWCMD use course reports to produce faculty reports and action plans which are reviewed by Faculty/College Quality Assurance Committees (F/CQACs). At institutional level the QAC receives faculty reports, action plans and board minutes and determines any University level actions arising from the process. The final stage is a summary report and action plan submitted to Academic Board for approval.

1.42 Collaborative partnership provision is monitored through a very similar process, with the course board membership extended to include partnerships staff. The partner produces a course report which feeds into the University-based course report or directly into the faculty report.

1.43 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by reading the Framework for the Management of Academic Standards and Quality, procedures for annual monitoring and the annexes, minutes of F/CQACs and QAC, module reviews, course reports, documentation showing changes resulting from annual monitoring, faculty action plans, the Management Information portal, external examiners' reports, the annual report from QAC to Academic Board, minutes of assessments boards and discussions with staff.

1.44 There is no explicit requirement in the course monitoring process or in the external examiners' report template to confirm that courses are delivered in accordance with the course specification, meet the UK threshold standards, follow the University's regulations, or continue to be current; however, these confirmations are implicit in the way the monitoring process aligns internal and external expectations. Staff confirmed that these aspects were considered as part of the holistic nature of course monitoring. External examiners confirm that the standards achieved by students are comparable with other institutions.



1.45 The University's procedures address and monitor alignment with threshold standards, and provide a sound framework for securing the academic standards of its awards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.4): In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:**

- **UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved**
- **the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.46 The advice, guidance and views of external experts are sought in the development, approval and review/revalidation of the University's academic provision. This enables independent scrutiny of the academic standards expected by the University during the development and approval of a course and throughout its delivery. It also ensures compliance with the UK academic framework for higher education and the demands of relevant PSRBs or accrediting agencies.

1.47 Validation and periodic review/revalidation panels include external academics or suitable professional practitioners as panel members, to provide independent scrutiny and to verify that the validated course provision meets threshold standards for academic awards and any relevant PSRB requirements. These externals may be supplemented by an employer or professional practitioner where appropriate. External examiners are appointed for each course following approval by the External Examiner Approval Panel (EEAP).

1.48 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by examining reports, policies, procedures and the minutes of relevant committees. The team also met undergraduate and postgraduate students, and academic and support staff.

1.49 The review team found that external examiners receive an introductory handbook and online guidance on their role and expectations, and mentoring by a more experienced examiner is provided if required. Annual reports from each external examiner inform the course and module monitoring processes within schools and faculties. Summary external examiner reports for University-based and collaborative partnership provision are produced for review by the QAC. External examiners confirm that the academic standard of provision is in accordance with UK standards and the University's requirements.

1.50 The University has recently determined that consultation with employers should form an integral part of the course development and approval process as it seeks to promote 'employer-responsive' education and enhance possibilities of learning in the workplace.

1.51 The review team found that the University uses suitably qualified and experienced external experts in the design, approval, assessment and monitoring of its academic provision. The team concluded that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.52 In reaching its judgement about the setting and maintenance of academic standards of awards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.53 Overall, the University meets its responsibilities for the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards. However, some issues and risks remain in connection with regulations for research degrees that contain an assessed taught component, and out-of-date or missing course specifications. The review team recognises that inconsistencies in the provision of information in student handbooks are being addressed by the University.

1.54 The review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the University **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

**Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.**

### **Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval**

#### **Findings**

2.1 Institutional oversight of the validation schedule and course approval mechanisms is maintained by the QAC, and the newly introduced process of annual portfolio review reviews the health of the portfolio in terms of recruitment and other risk factors.

2.2 At the first stage of course approval FQACs, or the College Academic Board for RWCMD, use a curriculum proposal form to summarise the evidence needed for an initial assessment of the business and academic risks that are likely to be incurred in the development and delivery of a course or modules. If approved, the proposal is subject to internal review by other faculties and professional services before being forwarded to the Deans and Executive Group (D&E) for University-level scrutiny and approval. If approved by the Deans and Executive Group, the chair of the FQAC, together with the Principal Quality Officer, then determines which validation process is required, based on the level of perceived risk. Approaches vary from a full University validation for subject areas that are new or include an innovative curriculum area or are multi-disciplinary, to paper-based approval for new modes of study to existing courses. There are also particular validation requirements for specialist provision such as distant online and learning through employment/accreditation.

2.3 Regardless of the validation process used, all courses are expected to produce a standard set of documentation and are subject to scrutiny using the same criteria. Courses are developed by in-house teams who are expected to consult with employers and address external and internal reference points. Detailed guidance on curriculum design is provided by the Curriculum Design Guide and course teams are expected to make use of reference points as defined by the Quality Code, Subject Benchmark Statements, PSRBs and the University's own regulatory frameworks. Validation panels are specifically asked to comment on their use. The criteria for course approval are defined in the procedures for course approval.

2.4 External expert members attend University-level approval events, and F/CQAC panels. For paper-based validations, externality is provided by the use of an external adviser, whose input is by correspondence.

2.5 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by reviewing the University's standards and quality framework, the regulations, procedures, ICIS workflow diagrams, guidelines governing the approval processes and by reading validation documentation, process documents and reports of approval panels, portfolio planning documents, minutes and actions plans reviewing the training and staff development provided, the minutes of F/CQAC and QAC, and by talking to staff and students.

2.6 The course approval process is clearly and comprehensively documented and works well, with a considerable number of new courses having been validated in the last two

years. Most courses are considered medium risk, including those with collaborative partner and delivered by distant online means, and are validated using the faculty process. The processes are well understood by staff. Students, however, have limited involvement in the process and are not routinely members of the course development teams or panels, although they are consulted through course committees and are invited to share their views on their experiences with the validation panel.

2.7 The review team noticed that certain aspects of course approval were not consistently or fully implemented. For example, the University states that 'all courses, unless exempt, are expected to be offered as distance online delivery'; and 'From January 2014 all courses must also consult with employers'. The University confirmed to the team that it has some way to go before such processes become routine parts of course approval. It also confirmed that the type of validation is decided by the faculty executive rather than the chair of the F/CQAC and the Principal Quality Officer as stated in the Framework. Further discussion of academic processes is given, and a recommendation made, under Expectation B6.

2.8 Based on the evidence from the portfolio review process in terms of the initial portfolio plans, the interactive nature of the scrutiny, actions plans and oversight by the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Board (VCEB), the process appears to be robust and form a sound basis for portfolio planning. It is potentially good practice, but the process is at an early stage of development and is yet to be formally documented and incorporated into the Framework.

2.9 The review team concludes that, overall, the design and operation of processes for the design, development and approval of courses ensure that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B2): Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education**

**Findings**

2.10 Processes for recruiting, selecting and admitting students to the University's taught courses are defined by the Admissions Policy. This policy has achieved ISO9001:2008 accreditation and applies to all members of the University of South Wales Group except RWCMD (see paragraph 2.12). It has been written to comply with relevant legislation and the Quality Code Chapter *B2, Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*. The Admissions Policy is reviewed and updated by the Admissions Forum. Any changes must be approved by the QAC. Specific procedures for research degree students are defined in the Regulations for Research Degrees (see B11). Widening access is a key priority for the University and its new Academic Plan sets targets to increase the number of students progressing from its further education partners. The Admissions Policy also embodies the University's commitment to equal opportunities and incorporates provision for receiving, considering and responding to complaints and appeals.

2.11 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by scrutinising information relating to applications and admissions, and documentation relating to the implementation and monitoring of associated policies and procedures. It also examined the operation of the procedures in meetings with undergraduate and postgraduate students, administrative and academic staff.

2.12 Following the merger a single admissions system, incorporating harmonised entry criteria, has operated from the start of the 2013-14 admissions cycle. This system applies to all parts of the University except the RWCMD; this has its own website and recruitment procedures reflecting its status as a conservatoire, and its admissions are processed through UCAS Conservatoires. Entry requirements are set at the time of course approval.

2.13 Specific guidance on applications and admissions processes for undergraduate, postgraduate and international students and those in partner colleges is readily accessible from the University's website. This includes details of how feedback is provided to unsuccessful applicants and the procedures for making a complaint or appealing against a decision. Search facilities enable potential students to review and select courses of interest according to level and mode of study. Course pages provide information on location of study, entry requirements, fees, course content, work placements and include links to Key Information Sets and UCAS. Online facilities enable students to track their application, register for an open day and request a prospectus. There are dedicated phone-lines and email addresses by which potential applicants can contact the Enquiries and Admissions Unit. A comprehensive series of dedicated pages for international students provide specific information on visa and English language requirements, fees and scholarships and other useful pre-departure and post-arrival information. In a limited number of courses some additional course costs are not covered by tuition fees and the University is taking steps to ensure that these are clear in its public information and in student handbooks.

2.14 The University's Collaborative Progression Plan demonstrates a thought-out, proactive approach to admissions for existing students studying in further education colleges, whereby staff give application advice, providing information on the courses of study

available and process of application. Bespoke sessions are provided for students studying in partner colleges to enable them to make informed decisions about the progression opportunities available to them. These activities are supported by progression officers who are based in the UHOVI; they operate mainly across the Strategic Alliance, and may also work with other partners.

2.15 The University has articulation agreements for advanced standing with 14 international partners. Procedures to establish these are defined in the Framework; the course leader maps the partner's course against the corresponding course in the University, and the external examiner scrutinises it prior to consideration by the relevant FQAC and subsequent approval following the procedures described in B10. The review team saw an example of mapping carried out and presented to the Partnership Panel, though there was little evidence of scrutiny by an external examiner. Articulation agreements specify that the University retains responsibility for approval of publicity material and the determination of entry requirements.

2.16 Staff within the Enquiries and Admissions Unit coordinate all enquiry and admission activity. They receive training for their role and a set of standard procedures ensure consistency in operation of recruitment practices. Potential students are kept advised of the status of their application and what they need to do to progress it. Students that declare a disability or additional learning need are referred to and followed up by the Disability and Dyslexia Service. Once they have arrived in the University an Individual Support Plan is developed for them and circulated to the relevant teaching staff via the University data-sharing system.

2.17 The University's Admissions Policy also relates to undergraduate courses delivered through collaborative partnerships. These have their own admissions systems that enable them to process the majority of applications. Any non-standard applications are passed to the University Link Officer (ULO) for their consideration. All students, including those in partner colleges, are registered by the University; hence the University is able to assure itself that all recruits have met its threshold entry criteria.

2.18 Policies and procedures kept under review by the Admission Forum, and as part of external accreditation where relevant. For example, a recent review has enabled the University to decrease the number of students that are required to attend for interview and expedite the process of making offers to candidates that have or anticipated to meet its threshold entry criteria.

2.19 The University supports successful applicants by providing detailed information before they arrive, and through a comprehensive central Welcome Week programme with activities held at different campuses. International students receive additional information pre and post-arrival, and they report that this is useful and tailored to their needs.

2.20 The review team concludes that the University's admissions systems are transparent, inclusive and reliable. Hence the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.**

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching***

#### **Findings**

2.21 The University's current Learning and Teaching Strategy is effectively that of the former UoG, the corresponding strategy for UWN having expired in 2014. Progress against defined and measurable targets is monitored by the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT); the resulting Annual Monitoring Statements are reviewed by the Equality and Diversity Steering Group and then approved by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee (LTEC) and the Executive before being submitted to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW).

2.22 The University recognises that the current strategy is no longer fit for purpose and is in the process of replacing it with a new one that fully reflects its Academic Plan. It is intended that the new strategy will be implemented in full by September 2016. The current Learning and Teaching Strategy and the realisation of the Academic Plan are being taken forward through the VCEB Portfolio and Student Lifecycle Sub-Group, the LTEC, and Faculty/College Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committees (F/CLTECs).

2.23 The Student Charter clearly defines the responsibilities of the University and its students in relation to teaching and learning. Staff are required to critically review their own teaching, learning and assessment practices through the recently introduced Reflection and Observation of Practice Scheme. Physical and human resources to support teaching and learning are considered during the course development, approval, annual monitoring, and course review and revalidation processes.

2.24 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by examining reports, policies, procedures and the minutes of relevant committees. The team also met undergraduate and postgraduate students, and academic and support staff.

2.25 The University's new Academic Plan is well articulated and stresses the importance of student engagement in learning and employability. It defines a series of goals with underpinning strategies and measurable targets by which it will be able to monitor the progress of implementation. The University has also recently developed an Academic Blueprint. Created in response to the Academic Plan, and informed by the outcomes of the National Student Survey (NSS), it is being introduced to ensure consistency in students' teaching and learning experiences. The Blueprint is under consideration by the Academic Board, but some aspects of it are already informing course validations and revalidations.

2.26 The University offers some degree courses entirely through the medium of Welsh. It is also planning to increase the number of opportunities for students to follow part of their course in Welsh by new internal appointments and through the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

2.27 Curriculum content, teaching and learning methods and opportunities for students to acquire transferable and employability skills are considered during the development of courses and confirmed at validation. The University has recognised the role of assessment



in supporting learning in the form of a specific Assessment for Learning policy and promotes consistency in assessment practices through an assessment tariff.

2.28 The University participated in the Higher Education Academy's 'Green Academy' change project and is promoting 'Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship' in curricula.

2.29 Approval of courses for distance online delivery requires consideration of course materials, teaching and facilities and student support. Delivery of these courses makes extensive use of a variety of online learning technologies but can also include components delivered at the University. Specialist IT support for blended learning is provided by the Technology Enhanced Learning Support Team.

2.30 The Academic Plan recognises the importance of inclusive teaching and accessible learning environments. Policies and procedures relating to students with disabilities or additional learning needs are clearly defined and are intended to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to fulfil their educational potential. Detailed guidance on designing inclusive curricula is available to course teams. At the start of each year all students are invited to complete a form which asks them to inform their Scheme Leader/Tutor of any impairment or illness which they feel may be relevant to their progress. Students the review team met confirmed that the University's Disability and Dyslexia Services were approachable and supportive.

2.31 The 'People Plan' commits the University to ensuring that all staff involved in teaching and learning are appropriately qualified and supported. New staff are required to undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Developing Professional Practice in Higher Education, which is also available to staff in partner organisations. Staff teaching University courses in partner colleges are required to achieve Recognised Teacher Status. The CELT offers a comprehensive programme of training courses and events to support the development of teaching staff. These are also available to staff in partner colleges. Support for postgraduate research (PGR) students who teach is addressed in B11.

2.32 Teaching and learning is initially overseen by F/CLTECs, reporting to LTEC, which in turn reports and makes recommendations to Academic Board. The terms of reference of these groups are appropriately defined, and relevant stakeholders, including students, are represented on them. The agendas and minutes of these committees indicate that they are effective in discharging their responsibilities.

2.33 Academic staff are able to analyse and enhance their own practices using student evaluation of modules, through peer observation of teaching and self-reflection. The results of the NSS and the ensuing action plans are approved by LTEC. The University also participates in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) although in this case the response rate is low and the findings are not reported by discipline. Teaching and learning in the University's partners is overseen by the relevant ULOs working in partnership with Partner Link Officers (PLO), and is monitored through the annual monitoring process (see B8).

2.34 Students report that there is variability in the scope and quality of information relating to teaching and learning that they receive in handbooks and on the UniLife webpage. Following the Learning Environment Review the University is adopting a new virtual learning environment (VLE) as standard from 2016-17, and has taken steps to define its expectations in terms of the minimum amount of information a student can expect to find there. (See also under Expectation C.)

2.35 The University is currently realigning its academic portfolio to create campuses with academic distinction. As part of this process the provision of library, IT and other physical

resources to support teaching and learning is being kept under review by the relevant sub-groups of the VCEB, which include student representation. Annual monitoring processes also allow the adequacy and sufficiency of teaching rooms and other learning resources to be assessed. In order to support implementation of its Academic Plan the University has invested in specialist facilities for simulation-based learning and introduced an institutional lecture capture system, both of which have been welcomed by students.

2.36 The review team concludes that the University has a clear strategic vision for teaching and learning. Policies and procedures are in place to ensure that all students have appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills and to ensure that teaching and learning is monitored and enhanced. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement**

**Findings**

2.37 Student development and achievement is guided by the Learning and Teaching Strategy. This is supported by the employability strategy, a student support strategy for student employability, welfare, administration and library services and graduate attributes, which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potentials.

2.38 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by examining reports, policies, procedures and the minutes of relevant committees. The team also met undergraduate and postgraduate students, Students' Union officers, and senior, academic, and support staff.

2.39 The University demonstrates the development of its strategic approach to employability with 93.5 per cent of graduates in employment or further study within six months of graduation. Over 300 employers support a proactive programme of careers and employability events. Schemes such as GradEdge, the Bright Ideas Network, Network75 and the Making Business Happen awards all contribute towards this, enabling and encouraging students to fulfil their personal and professional potential. Additionally, personal careers advice is offered through the Employability and Careers Service.

2.40 The Student Success Group (SSG) determines strategy and policies focusing on transition, retention, progression and achievement, and reports on progress to the Academic Board. The SSG has identified issues surrounding retention, which is not consistent across the University, and unreliable data, as 'expected' leaving dates are used when closing down student's records. In response to retention concerns, consultation with the Students' Union has seen the First Experience Week remodelled as the new Welcome Week, with a greater emphasis on the academic experience. This runs alongside course-level induction for both new and returning students. The University continues to use retention, progress and achievement data, together with Students' Union feedback, to monitor the success of these initiatives.

2.41 Retention, progression and achievement are all monitored through strategies at Academic Board; this includes the use of NSS, PTES, and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey data. Issues surrounding the bunching of assessments have been addressed at the level of some individual courses, but bunching remains a broader issue (see B6).

2.42 UniLife, a central student information webpage, offers hyperlinks to a variety of student information, including Academic Appeals and Student Complaints procedures, Chaplaincy, Counselling services, Disability advice, Student Charter, term dates and timetabling information, and library services, enabling students to access a variety of necessary information. The development of a UniLife mobile app is a positive development. The Listening to You webpage offers an opportunity for students to feedback, and is supported by the 'You said, we did' campaign.

2.43 The University has drawn its expertise in governmental leadership, transport, health and social care policy, economic growth and future skills, criminology and police sciences, and regeneration, together within the Centre for Advanced Studies in Public Policy, in an effort to fulfil its aim to become one of the UK's leading public policy hubs.

In this way it also seeks to help in redressing the national skills shortage set out by the Welsh Government in 'For Our Future'. Other work-related provisions include placements for students, research opportunities, and a range of technical and professional facilities to support learning.

2.44 The University has demonstrated the capacity for direct action when faced with problems affecting students: for example, when some students in a health-related area encountered issues in relation to requirements for professional accreditation, the University worked with students and the course team to review the course so that its content met the requirements of the professional body. The University also ensured that additional support was available. While this situation was not desirable, the University demonstrated a commitment to students' personal, academic and professional development.

2.45 The University demonstrates a strategic commitment to student career development with industrial work placements, research, and development of courses. It works with a variety of high-profile companies and organisations including Rolls-Royce, Microsoft, Tata Steel, the BBC, Airbus, Sony, and General Electric. It has developed a partnership for aircraft engineering with British Airways, with qualifications needed for the industry under BA's Civil Aviation Authority licence. A partnership between four major financial service companies has brought forward an MSc in Financial Services, combining work experience with part-time study. The University has also supported the creation of 52 graduate start-ups in 2013-14 (compared with 42 in the previous year), and it notes that 106 graduate start-ups are still active after three years.

2.46 The University is increasingly committed to Work-based Learning in the context of its Academic Blueprint, which was still being developed at the time of the review visit. A WBL policy clarifies the responsibilities and roles of the various parties involved in this area, including external partners, with the aim of ensuring that faculties and course teams are able to deliver high quality WBL. The Academic Blueprint envisages that in future all undergraduate students will participate in at least 70 hours of relevant work experience or equivalent during their degree course. There is already ownership of this ambition at support service level. The Academic Blueprint also focuses on the development of library skills and induction, referencing skills and the use of technology in learning. Under the Skills and Employability Action Plan, an employer's guide has been developed so that the University can help employers to recruit graduates and provide appropriate work experience. A High Flyers' Scheme provides 40 weeks of paid work experience, together with a development programme, for graduates.

2.47 The RWCMD is very well placed to move forward with the Academic Plan's employability agenda. All students are involved in vocational employability activities. For example, actors create a theatre company as part of their final year production, and musicians are involved in orchestras.

2.48 CELT provides seminars to support and develop staff engagement with students as partners, change agents and co-developers, as part of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) Future Directions initiative. In some cases, students themselves have delivered seminars to staff.

2.49 Taking all this evidence into account, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement**

**Findings**

2.50 The University's approach to student engagement is highlighted in its Vision and Mission and in the Academic Plan. Students are represented on the Board of Governors, the Academic Board, and on most committees including those at faculty and course level. The Students' Union President sits on the Academic Board. Student business is prioritised as the first item on the agenda in both the QAC and LTEC. The University Executive holds termly meetings with Students' Union officers and staff, and there are monthly meetings between Students' Union officers and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic). Officers of the Students' Union also have regular informal access to senior staff. The RWCMD has its own Students' Union President who sits on its governance and academic boards, and attends the Principal's Development Group. The University gathers student feedback through course and module questionnaire surveys, and makes use of NSS data.

2.51 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by examining reports, policies, procedures and the minutes of relevant committees. The team also met undergraduate and postgraduate students, and academic and support staff.

2.52 The University seeks additional student engagement for special projects, such as the ongoing campus realignment, with student involvement in the Project Management Board and its three campus subcommittees. The University recognises the importance of the student voice in these matters, particularly in connection with financial and accommodation concerns, and decisions relating to the transfer of students between sites. This kind of engagement is supported by the Students' Union.

2.53 The University has a typical Student Charter, developed in conjunction with the Students' Union and widely advertised on student information portals. It has also created a Relationship Agreement with the Students' Union. The Relationship Agreement is annually reviewed by a group comprising Students' Union officers and academic and support staff. It sets out principles for enhancing students' experience, protecting and furthering the interests of students, and promoting the meaningful inclusion of the student voice in all activities. The Agreement ensures that the University will provide appropriate training, one-to-one support and mentoring in order to enable student representatives, of all types, to engage effectively. The Agreement is currently under review, and is likely to be replaced by a Service Level Agreement for 2015-16. The University and the Students' Union are making efforts to ensure greater transparency of representation, by making Student-Staff Course Liaison Group minutes available to all students through the VLE.

2.54 Students are informed about responses to their feedback through a 'You said, we did' campaign. The Listening to You webpage outlines ways in which students can give feedback, while informing students on changes made as a result of their feedback. All students have access to the course representatives and the Student Voice Representative (SVR) pages on the Students' Union website.

2.55 The University participates in the Wales Initiative for Student Engagement (Wise Wales), which supports the engagement of students as active participants in the leadership, management, development and delivery of their own educational experience. It has included the Students' Union Vice-President as a member of the Student Retention and Success

Project from the early stages of planning and throughout the first two years of the project, which included student-led staff development seminars. The review team found examples of significant improvements in student retention in some courses.

2.56 In addition to the Students' Union sabbatical officers and course representatives, the University has strengthened student engagement by operating the SVR scheme. It provides training for the SVR role, which is specifically focused around academic and policy matters. To encourage participation it has introduced a scholarship fund for SVRs to develop work-related skills, and the GradEdge scheme recognises the work-related skills gained through involvement as an SVR. Course representatives and SVRs are provided with a handbook and supported by the Senior Project Officer, which also takes responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of the scheme. The SVR scheme has supported student engagement in course approval.

2.57 In response to disappointing NSS feedback, the University engaged an external consultant to produce a Student Feedback and Student Representation Report. This report addresses low levels of student feedback (noting that some students do not complete course evaluations throughout their undergraduate studies) and the ineffectiveness of online feedback platforms. The report also highlights the positive use of informal channels for feedback. QAC is currently considering the report's initial proposals, focusing on the redefinition of the relationship between course representatives and SVRs, enhancing the use of module and course evaluations, and further clarifying the roles of the course boards and student-staff consultative groups. The Students' Union welcomes the University's commitment to student engagement, recognising that the role of SVRs has been strengthened through more formal training in quality mechanisms, and discussions have been initiated at a high level on improving the role of course representatives. At the time of the review visit there was some discussion about transferring responsibility for SVRs from the University to the Students' Union.

2.58 Until the end of the 2013-14 session each faculty had a PGR SVR who sat on its Research Programme Subcommittee (RPSC). Following a review by the Executive this role was discontinued. To replace these SVRs the University sought volunteers from across its PGR student community at the start of 2014-15. Following a selection and interview process conducted by the Graduate Research Office, three new representative PGR students were selected, one full-time student from the Faculty of Computing, Engineering and Science and two part-time students from the Faculty of Business and Society. These representative students received no training. Email groups have been established to give these representative students the opportunity to engage with and canvas the views of their constituencies. However, students in the Faculty of Creative Industries and the Faculty of Life Sciences and Education no longer have any research student representation. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the University ensure that appropriate and effective representation mechanisms are used to engage with all postgraduate research students.

2.59 In the University's collaborative partnerships, student representation is a matter for the college or organisation, with training and key contacts based in the colleges. In the event of a University-related issue, course representatives from partner colleges have access to advice services, resources and facilities of the University. Partnership student representatives also have access to SVR resources and support at the University. The review team heard that students in local further education college partnerships have, and use, access to University and Students' Union resources, though the principal attraction seemed to be access to physical resources rather than working with the Students' Union to enhance the student voice.

2.60 Notwithstanding the PGR representation issues addressed above, the review team concludes that overall the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B6): Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.**

**Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning***

**Findings**

2.61 The University's assessment processes are aligned to a range of strategies, policies and procedures that underpin undergraduate and postgraduate assessment. The Learning and Teaching Strategy provides the framework for effective and progressive assessment at all levels in accordance with the Quality Code. This is supported by an Assessment for Learning Policy and an Assessment Tariff that provide assessment guidance to staff and students, promote the integration of learning and academic skills development within different assessment tasks, and identify the framework for assessment grading. The adoption of the new Academic Blueprint should provide a more explicit and prescriptive framework for course design and assessment.

2.62 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by examining reports, policies, procedures and the minutes of relevant committees. The team also met undergraduate and postgraduate students, and academic and support staff.

2.63 The CELT website provides helpful information for academic staff seeking to use technology-enhanced assessment activities. Peer marking amongst students as a formative feedback mechanism, and electronic submission, marking and feedback on assessments, are being increasingly employed within modules and courses across the University. The development of assessment tasks more closely linked to vocational and work-related experiences is expanding across the University and has been commended by some external examiners.

2.64 The validation process determines the extent and nature of assessment demands within a course. The slightly outdated Assessment Tariff offers helpful guidance to academic staff on the volume and scheduling of assessment demands within a module and course. This guidance is not reinforced in the University's Course Developers Guide or Curriculum Design Guide. Implementation of the Academic Blueprint in 2015-16 should consolidate the nature and volume of module assessment requirements and reinforce the parity of assessment demands on students.

2.65 The Students' submission expressed concern about 'assessment bunching' towards the end of academic sessions. The importance of Assessment Diaries is being reinforced across the University to promote more consistent and secure planning of assessment demands by staff and students, and to avoid assessment overload at particular periods in the academic calendar. The University acknowledges the relatively poor use of its Assessment Diary scheme across faculties and is seeking to provide further guidance to academic staff on the appropriate volume and scheduling of assessment within a module and course. Discussion with students and academic staff confirmed the limited impact of Assessment Diaries on 'assessment bunching' and examples of some assessment items being subject to short-notice change in submission dates were identified. The review team considered that further work was needed to achieve greater consistency in this area, but it also noted that progress had been made in that direction (see above). The review team

therefore **affirms** the systematic mechanisms being developed to improve the timeliness and nature of assessment feedback across all University provision.

2.66 The Students' submission, the NSS, and the PTES in 2014 have noted that inconsistencies in the timeliness and quality of assessment feedback to students have been a recurring concern at the University (and at its predecessor institutions). The University has acknowledged this concern, and particularly the shortcomings in the provision of student assessment feedback within the specified 20-day turnaround period. Steps are being taken to improve the turnaround time for assessment feedback, and to promote greater consistency in the nature and extent of feedback. Alongside the enhanced promotion of Assessment Diaries, a University-wide Assessment and Feedback Coversheet, designed to promote greater consistency in defining and commenting on assessments, was sanctioned by LTEC in September 2014, and its use is to be evaluated at the end of the 2014-15 academic year. However, undergraduate and postgraduate students reported that the timeliness of assessment feedback remained an issue across the University.

2.67 Responsibility for assuring the timeliness of assessment feedback rests between Course Leaders and Heads of School. However, following discussion with staff and students, the review team could not find evidence that the University was systematically and routinely tracking and monitoring the timeliness and nature of assessment feedback. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University make more systematic and effective use, at school level and above, of the University's academic processes and monitoring procedures so as to ensure that its policies and practices are consistently applied.

2.68 In making this recommendation the review team was mindful of other inconsistencies and variabilities which had not been identified and/or addressed effectively, by managers at school, faculty and institutional levels, through the University's academic and monitoring processes. For example, in this section, concerns about assessment bunching; inconsistencies in marking and internal moderation processes; and uncertainties about the adoption of assessment cover sheets. The team also considered that other matters of inconsistency addressed by recommendations in this report might have been dealt with more effectively had the University's academic processes and monitoring procedures been applied more systematically, particularly in a time of institutional change and transition.

2.69 Examination procedures are consistent with practice across the sector and the University is aware of the importance of consistent application of procedures at partnership institutions. The Assessment and Awards Unit supports faculties in securing the management of assessments, and training is provided for invigilators within the University and at collaborative partnership organisations. The University is strengthening communication with partner colleges to consolidate its management of assessment administration. All University staff and those involved in assessment management at partner institutions receive an induction to Data Protection and Freedom of Information requirements.

2.70 Samples of all assessed work, including that completed at collaborative partner organisations and for Welsh-speaking students, are made available for independent expert scrutiny by external examiners, who may include suitably qualified practitioners where students' professional competence is being examined. (See also B7.)

2.71 Marking and internal moderation of student assessments is governed by the University's regulations for taught courses, and equivalent procedures are being followed for students who remain subject to the regulations of legacy institutions until they complete their courses. The University does not provide definitive guidance to academic staff on the appropriate sample of student assessments that are required to undertake effective internal



moderation of module assessment items. Exploration of sampling and internal moderation procedures with University staff confirmed variable practice. The University has acknowledged the need to improve its sampling and moderation processes, and make more use of its associated monitoring procedures (see paragraph 2.71), and it will no doubt wish to expedite this.

2.72 External examiners have queried the transparency and consistency of internal marking and moderation practices in the University and at some further education college partners. Subsequent moderation and verification of student work by University staff was reported to be robust and effective. The University is providing additional training and guidance for further education college partners, and some exemplary University moderation practices were evident following review team discussions with academic staff and international partners. (See also B7, B10.)

2.73 The University's Subject Assessment Boards and Award and Progression Assessment Boards ensure parity and consistency of assessment procedures and outcomes. This two-tier system is organised on a campus basis, which has created some difficulties for courses delivered across two or more campuses. The University is reviewing this organisational arrangement and also seeking to enhance the use of comparative data in reviewing the assessment profiles of students and courses. Minor discrepancies in the management of Subject Assessment Boards have been identified by the University through its annual monitoring procedures and from external examiner reports. Additional training and guidance has been provided to improve consistency/reduce variability in the operational management and administration of Assessment Boards across the University.

2.74 Information for students who seek recognition of prior learning (RPL) is made available on the University website. Following involvement in a regional RPL project, the University has embedded RPL activities across all faculties providing guidance and training for academic and support staff on RPL for entry, exemption and accreditation in accordance with European guidelines and the HEA. RPL guidance for students and employers is available through the University's newly adopted Learning through Employment framework and an Introductory Guide. The CELT website provides helpful information on RPL for employers. The University has engaged with RPL effectively in the development of its academic provision with public sector employers in the military, local government and health services. The review team found the provision of high-quality, focused and accessible guidance on the recognition of prior learning for employers and applicants to be **good practice**.

2.75 The review team concludes that the University operates secure, equitable and valid assessment processes. It supports students who wish to be assessed in the medium of the Welsh language. The development and implementation of RPL guidance and procedures were commendable. The team had less certainty over the University's monitoring of the timeliness of return and volume of assessment feedback provided to students. In addition, the sampling and internal moderation processes lacked consistency and transparency. In both of these aspects of provision, the University has acknowledged the need to improve the underlying assessment processes and associated monitoring procedures. As a consequence, while the Expectation is met, there remains a moderate risk to the standards and quality of assessment processes.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

## **Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.**

### **Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

#### **Findings**

2.76 The Framework defines the roles and responsibilities of external examiners in accordance with the Quality Code. This is supplemented by the University's Handbook for External Examiners and dedicated guidance available on the University website.

2.77 The Academic Board has institutional responsibility for the appointment of external examiners. An External Examiner Approval Panel (EEAP) considers initial nominations for appointment to taught-award courses and the Research Programme Subcommittee (RPSC) deals with nominations for research degree awards. Supported nominations for external examiners progress to the QAC for consideration before the Academic Board grants final approval and agreement on any training or support requirements. Where it might be difficult to appoint an appropriately experienced external examiner, a mentoring scheme is used to support less experienced appointees, and a revised Mentor Handbook has been introduced for 2014-15. A review of the EEAP has taken place in 2014-15 to ensure Panel membership is sufficient and the external examiner appointment process resilient.

2.78 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by examining reports, policies, procedures and the minutes of relevant committees. The team also met undergraduate and postgraduate students, and academic and support staff.

2.79 In accordance with QAA guidelines, where a module is taught in a language other than English or where a student prefers to submit assessed work in Welsh, suitably qualified Welsh-speaking external examiners are appointed wherever possible. If this is not possible, student work is either transcribed into English or additional support and training is provided for the examiner.

2.80 External examiners' reports are scrutinised by a senior member of the Academic Standards and Quality Service and respective Heads of School and Course Leaders across all University provision, including collaborative partnerships. Incomplete or imprecise reports are followed-up by the Academic Standards and Quality Service, and the Collaborative Quality Unit for collaborative partners, and a combined summary report is provided for consideration by the QAC and Academic Board. A revised External Examiner Report template has been designed to distinguish between the external scrutiny of University-based students and those attending partner institutions. The University has acknowledged the need for clearer differentiation of student cohorts to enhance comparative evaluation and this process will be aided by the increasing use of electronic submission via the VLE. Where an external examiner has serious concerns over academic standards a confidential report can also be sent to the Vice-Chancellor (see also A2.2, A3.2). Summary Module Reviews are presented/made available to external examiners during their attendance at Subject Assessment Boards.

2.81 The University reviews its external examiners' reports, for 'home' and collaborative provision, to ensure that any issues emerging from examiners' reports are considered within the annual monitoring process. These reviews capture common themes and significant issues that require resolution. It is not always clear how subsequent recommendations and actions are carried out and monitored: some themes (for example, timeliness of assessment feedback, moderation, external examiners' workloads) recur in annual reports without apparent corporate resolution. Communications with external examiners have been

improved recently, although the University still has some difficulty in securing the timely submission of external examiner reports.

2.82 Some external examiners have raised concerns over their workloads. The University does not provide definitive guidance on the volume of assessment items scrutinised by external examiners to ensure equitable and comparable examination of academic standards. Auditing of external examiner workloads has recently been completed by the EEAP and more definitive guidance recommended for implementation in 2015-16. To meet the demands of the University's developing academic portfolio, the appointment of new external examiners will support and enhance the University's engagement with collaborative partners and development of work-related assessment activities within its academic portfolio. In reviewing external examiners' reports and in discussion with senior staff, the team found that the University's definition of external examiner moderation and sampling and workload comparability for 2014-15 remained uncertain. Despite this disparity in external examiner workloads there is no evidence from their annual reports to suggest there has been any adverse impact on the security of academic standards.

2.83 Some inconsistencies and lack of transparency in the University's second-marking and moderation procedures have been identified in external examiners' reports, particularly within further education college partnerships (see B6). Subsequent moderation and verification of student work by University staff was reported to be robust and effective. Some exemplary University moderation practices were evident following review team discussions with academic staff of the University and its further education and international partners. The University is providing additional training and guidance on moderation for further education college partners. (See also under Expectation B10.)

2.84 Student representatives should have formal access to summaries of external examiners' reports through their attendance at Course Boards. Undergraduate and taught postgraduate students reported minimal engagement with external examiners' reports. University staff acknowledged that student access to external examiners' reports required reinforcement. The review team **recommends** that the University ensure that external examiners' reports are routinely and transparently available to students.

2.85 The review team also found some uncertainty as to how students were made aware of actions or responses taken in response to external examiners' reports. The University has stated that it is seeking to promote greater consistency and comparability in its annual action planning procedures across faculties and schools to ensure that responses to external examiners' reports are timely, and routinely accessible by students.

2.86 The review team found that the University's appointment, support for, and engagement with external examiners was broadly dependable. Issues of comparability of external examiners' workload, moderation and sampling were being addressed. The University recognises the need to strengthen the consistency of student access to external examiners' reports. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review**

**Findings**

2.87 The University states that annual monitoring is in place to ensure that standards are maintained and there is a continuous enhancement of courses. The starting premise is that annual monitoring is an integral part of the faculty or RWCMD quality assurance and enhancement model and should be viewed as a continuous, systematic process operating on an annual cycle.

2.88 Annual monitoring is conducted at five interconnected levels: module, course, school, faculty/college, and University, each with the gate keeper, activities and gateway specified in the procedures. On completion of a module, the module leader is required to produce a draft report using a data set and a standard template that addresses the external examiners comments, student module feedback, employer feedback (where available) and student performance. The report is presented to the subject assessment board. Issues of module performance and operation are discussed in the presence of the external examiner and if necessary changes to modules are made via the modification process. The final versions of the reports are submitted to the faculty quality teams and the course leader.

2.89 The course leader has the responsibility for organising the course review, including collaborative partner's provision (where relevant), leading the discussion at the course board and producing the course report and action plan. Course leaders are encouraged to seek the views of part-time staff and professional services as part of the review. In evaluating the course the course leader is required to take into account the external examiners' reports, student feedback and course performance data. Course boards for annual monitoring purposes have a defined membership which include students. Administration officers capture any faculty or RWCMD-level issues for inclusion in the faculty or college annual monitoring report and plan progress on the action plans which form a standard part of course boards' agendas.

2.90 Heads of schools take an overview of the outcomes of course boards, noting issues of good practice and issues for exploration. The deans of faculties and the Principal of the RWCMD, drawing on the course reports and action plans, should use a standard template to produce a faculty annual monitoring report and action plan and present them to the F/CQAC. Included on the committee membership is an 'auditor', a member of the University independent of the F/CQAC, whose role is to confirm the effectiveness of the evaluation.

2.91 The next stage is scrutiny by the QAC, which receives the faculty reports, action plans and board minutes and which determines any University-level actions arising from the process. The final stage is a summary report and action plan submitted to Academic Board for approval. The QAC commissioned a review of annual monitoring in 2013-14, which made a number of recommendations, including the adoption of a more risk-based approach which is under development.

2.92 Collaborative partners follow a very similar process, with the course board membership extended to include key partnerships staff and the course report feeding into the University-based course report or directly into the faculty report.

2.93 All courses are subject to re-validation every six years and changes are controlled through the FQAC. Where the faculty takes a decision to close a course, a course closure action plan is prepared and approved by the FQAC, which then monitors the phasing out of the course.

2.94 The monitoring of postgraduate research students is undertaken on an individual basis, with the annual statement of progress feeding into the Annual Progression Board. Overall performance of postgraduate students is kept under view by the Graduate Research Office, who prepare reports for the Faculty Research Programme Committees and ultimately the University research committee and Quality Assurance Committee.

2.95 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by reviewing the University's standards and quality framework, the Annual Monitoring website, the procedures for annual monitoring and annexes, the management information portal, external examiners' reports, minutes of FQACs and QAC, module reviews course reports, digests, and action plans, documentation showing changes resulting from annual monitoring, faculty action plans, the annual report from QAC to Academic Board, minutes of assessments boards, re-validation reports, examples of course modifications and online staff development material for the generation and use of reports.

2.96 A new, standardised annual monitoring process was introduced for 2014. The review team saw extensive evidence that the process is working effectively, including the identification of good practice and actions for enhancement, continuous monitoring of actions plans by course teams, and changes resulting from the process. While new in its current format, the process appeared to be well documented, understood by staff and allowed effective institutional oversight.

2.97 Module reviews are informed by Student Achievement Performance Indicator (SAPI) reports which contain the key student performance indicators for modules. Course reports were informed by comprehensive Course Digests, containing the key data points for courses (including progressions data, NSS, Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE), and good honours outcomes), which actions were incorporated into the course action plans where appropriate. The use of data to inform the outcomes of annual course monitoring was fully embedded.

2.98 Where a module is delivered across multiple sites and/or partnerships, only one report is produced. This summarises the performance on the module but does not facilitate differentiation between locations. The review team was assured that the performances of modules at each location were subject to scrutiny by the Partnership Quality Sub-Committee, and that ULOs were provided with the data for each centre, which would be fed into the course report where appropriate.

2.99 Students are not involved in the scrutiny of the raw course data (including external examiners' reports) which leads to the production of the course report. Instead, students see the draft reports and action plans at course committees. Practice was mixed as to whether students actually saw external examiners' reports.

2.100 While faculty deans and the Principal of the RWCMD are meant to produce a report to accompany the faculty actions plans, QAC has exempted them from this requirement for the last two years. Faculty plans are subject to scrutiny by FQACs and the RWCMD QAC, which includes an auditor from another faculty, and then by QAC. QAC reports to Academic Board on the progress and produces a University action plan. This process provides independent internal assurance of the thoroughness of the scrutiny and institutional oversight.

2.101 The review team concludes that the University discharges its responsibilities for operating effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of courses. The Expectation B8 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints**

**Findings**

2.102 Academic Appeals and Student Complaints regulations are clearly articulated in the Regulations for Taught Courses. Similar regulations for Research Degrees and those on courses previously validated by UWN are also clearly outlined in further documentation.

2.103 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by examining reports, policies, procedures and the minutes of relevant committees. The team also met undergraduate and postgraduate students, and academic and support staff.

2.104 Following the formation of the University, the Student Complaints Procedure from the former UoG was adopted across the new institution. However, to ensure consistency, former Newport students retained the former UWN's appeals and complaints regulations, though these will be phased out by the time the final pre-merger Newport students graduate. Students showed a clear understanding of this.

2.105 Students are given clear information about regulations and procedures regarding appeals and complaints through websites, Campus Advice Centres, student representatives, and UniLife. The relationship between the informal and formal stages of complaints is clearly outlined. The Student Charter explains students' obligation to make themselves aware of the University's handbooks and procedures, and to abide by regulations.

2.106 The complaints procedure is supported by student conciliators, who are members of staff with no prior involvement with the case. During the second stage of the complaints procedure a conciliator is chosen to consider the range of possible solutions to resolve the situation and propose an outcome to both sides. The complainant and the faculty/ department/ college meet with the conciliator, individually or jointly, to discuss the proposed solutions. If the complainant is not satisfied with the proposed solution, the procedure moves forward to stage 3. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) has commended the University's creation of student conciliators, highlighting the competence, commitment and integrity they bring to the process.

2.107 The complaints and appeals of students studying at partner institutions are dealt with by the University, which is seeking to ensure that students are able to engage with these processes effectively before they need them. The Student Casework Unit offers specialist advice on complaints and appeals regulations and procedures. However, the Course Handbook Working Group's recommendations do not feature information on the appeals and complaints process. See also under Expectation C.

2.108 As part of the University's monitoring processes for academic appeals and student complaints, the Student Casework Unit holds an annual meeting with student conciliators to share information, consider previous cases and share best practice. The Student Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Group (SACCG) has implemented changes into the way appeals and complaints metrics are recorded. SACCG membership is drawn from the academic community, professional support services, and the Students' Union. SACCG reviews the number and nature of cases submitted each year, the nature and consistency of the resolutions, the operation of procedures, cases of good practice and lessons learnt, and

cases referred to the OIA, and evaluates the effectiveness of the complaints and appeals process altogether. SACCG minutes are received by Academic Board, and from this academic year will also be received by LTEC.

2.109 The appeals and complaints' regulations and procedures clearly articulate timeframes for the development and resolution of cases. A report is provided to SACCG each year in relation to timeframes and, where an unacceptable amount of time has been taken to respond, an explanation is required. Following feedback from faculties, QAC agreed to extend the deadlines for the 2013-14 academic year.

2.110 Taking all this evidence into account, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**



**Expectation (B10): Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.**

**Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others***

**Findings**

2.111 At its formation the University inherited from its predecessor institutions a significant number of UK and overseas collaborative partnerships. All these partnerships were subsequently reviewed and the University now operates a rationalised portfolio of partnerships in which no provision is delivered or assessed in languages other than English or Welsh. Numbers of current partnerships are as given on page 4. Its Academic Plan places academic partnerships at the heart of its mission, with an intention to identify and grow a number of 'new international partnerships of scale' over the next several years.

2.112 Currently partnerships with UK further education colleges dominate the University's collaborative portfolio, including a network of further education colleges in a Strategic Alliance with the University. The Alliance develops further relationships already established within the UHOVI and provides a framework in which provision is developed collaboratively to best exploit the resources of the various partners, to meet the regional market demand, and to offer progression opportunities for students within the region. The University publishes a comprehensive register of its collaborative partnerships which is reviewed at every meeting of the Partnership Quality Subcommittee.

2.113 Arrangements for the academic regulation of collaborative partnerships, including approving, monitoring and reviewing partnership arrangements, are agreed by QAC, endorsed by Academic Board, and detailed in the Framework. Its typology describes the different models of partnership and resonates well with the Quality Code *Chapter B10*. The University has chosen not to validate provision designed by partner institutions, restricting its relationships to franchise and joint franchise provision. The institution's typology of permitted collaborative relationships includes dual awards, but the University does not have any dual award arrangements at present. It has also developed a number of articulation arrangements, and has an established process for approving places of work for flexible learning arrangements. There are a number of supporting documents detailing the associated procedures. The processes for approval of collaborative courses are the same as for 'home' provision (see also A3.4 and B1), informed by the context of the partnership. They are prefaced by a site visit to inform due diligence and risk assessments, and a subsequent process to approve the proposed collaborating institution as a partner of the University, following which formal agreements are made and signed by the University and partner. The formal partnership approval panel will also visit the proposed partner if the partnership had been assessed as potentially high risk at the initial evaluation stage. Partner institutions and organisations are reviewed and re-approved on a six-yearly cycle, although the University reserves the right to conduct an interim review after the first twelve months of operation. The review is informed by similar evidence to that required on initial approval, together with a critical review of the operation of the partnership. The associated risk assessments determine whether the review is paper-based and signed off by the International and UK Partnerships VCEB Sub-Group, or whether it is considered by a full approval panel.

2.114 Arrangements for the monitoring and review of collaborative courses similarly follow those for onsite provision (see also A3.3, A3.4 and B8). Where courses are delivered at both partners and the University, staff from the University attend Course Boards held both at the partner, and at the University. The University Course Board thus considers matters raised at

all delivery centres, matters raised by all external examiners, following which a single Course Board report and action plan encompasses all instances of delivery. Where partners have relationships with the University that include more than one course, an overarching organisational-level annual report is also submitted to the University.

2.115 At University level, annual summaries of Collaborative Partner Reports, and comments from external examiners who have considered work from courses delivered in partner institutions, are considered by QAC and Academic Board. QAC is thus able to make comparisons between 'home' and partner provision with respect to academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities.

2.116 The responsibility for oversight of partnership matters rests with QAC, and detailed consideration is formally delegated to the Partner Quality Subcommittee. Initial business consideration of potential partners, and their alignment with the University at a strategic level is considered by the VCEB International and UK Partnerships Group (a function previously managed by a University Partnerships Panel).

2.117 CQU provides support for faculties and partners at all stages of the academic cycle, and provides a wealth of comprehensive guidance for ULOs and PLOs who form the academic operational communication channel between the University and partner. All staff teaching on University provision in a partner institution must be approved by the University through its Recognised Teacher Status (RTS) scheme. Such staff are offered fee abatement for University staff development activities.

2.118 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by scrutinising process documentation, evaluating papers and reports associated with approval, review and annual monitoring activities, scrutinising partnership agreements and student handbooks, reading a variety of committee papers and meeting staff and students from both the University and partner institutions.

2.119 The review team found that partnership approval and review events were thorough and detailed; papers were detailed and it was clear that due diligence had been conducted. Approval panels included appropriate peer external experts. Resourcing matters are considered at approval, and while it is anticipated that students in partner institutions will have access to appropriate facilities in their home institutions, they do have online access to University resources (and physical access also if they choose to visit). Student handbooks additionally signpost the support available from student services at both University and the partner organisation, and students received an appropriate induction to the University, their College and their course.

2.120 The subsequent agreements between the University and its partner organisations appeared fit for purpose, and identified the broad areas of responsibility of the partners. Award certificates and transcripts, which are produced by the University (see also C), identify the location and language of study. Admissions decisions were invariably approved, if not made by, the University, and the ULO was often involved in borderline cases. The process for closing partnerships appears well documented, and addresses the need to secure the student experience throughout the teach-out period. The evidence demonstrates a sympathetic but firm approach to the closure arrangements, with no dilution of institutional care and oversight throughout the teach-out period.

2.121 The review team found that partner institutional annual reports and annual reports from ULOs were comprehensive and evaluative, and the University's summary annual report reflected the view of partners and ULOs, and any key matters identified in annual course reports. Student feedback suggests the HE in FE student experience is an area which could be improved. The team heard how one resourcing matter identified in the annual monitoring exercise resulted in the suspension of recruitment to one collaborative course and the

relocation of the remaining cohort of students to the University campus, and how comments from the external examiner on an overseas partnership were swiftly addressed. Similarly, comments in external examiners' reports regarding collaborative provision were consolidated in an institutional level summary report. The team did, however, find that comments regarding collaborative provision in annual course and external examiners' reports were sometimes lost within the volume of narrative pertaining to on-site provision. The University has itself identified this matter as QAC has commissioned a review to consider how best to consistently secure such reflection on all collaborative courses each year.

2.122 The Recognised Teacher Status scheme is well understood; the review team found the process of recognition to be clear and well conducted. The management of partnership provision appears to adhere to the same principles that apply on campus. There are additional checks and balances built into the collaborative provision procedures. For example, ULOs and PLOs, who play a key role in quality management and communication processes for partnership working, receive a comprehensive training and support package from the CQU. The ULOs play a crucial role in ensuring the good health of the partnership. Their duties include direct oversight of the academic courses delivered by the partner, acting as the principal communication channel between the institutions, ensuring consistency of processes and standards across the partnership, visiting the partner on a regular basis, meeting students and encouraging their contribution to quality management processes, supporting partner staff in their engagement with University processes, identifying staff development needs, supporting partner staff through the process of gaining recognised teacher status, assisting with student induction and enrolment, managing the assessment process, coordinating the pre and post-assessment moderation of student work, and coordinating the engagement of external examiners with the partner. The ULO also produces an annual report for the University, and provides direct feedback on the annual monitoring process to the partner. ULOs are extremely well-received and acknowledged by staff in partner institutions. The review team considers the role of ULOs in the support of current collaborative partnership operations to be **good practice**. Comparability of academic standards of courses delivered at more than one site is confirmed by cross-institutional moderation and using the same external examiners across the provision. The University plans to convene an annual partnership conference, to provide a vehicle for the collaborative enhancement agenda.

2.123 Following up the Concern referred to it by the QAA (pages 4-5), the review team paid particular attention to a case of unauthorised promotion of University courses overseas by a collaborative partner. The University has, in its Strategy, its Vision, and its emerging strategies for teaching and learning and Internationalisation, placed some focus both upon exploiting distance and online media and growing its base of international students. It has identified a strategic overseas partner with which it is working to move forward in both areas. The partner university is relatively mature in the delivery of online material, and the strategic partnership includes two phases; firstly the development and delivery of wholly online versions of University courses, and secondly the delivery of some University courses in blended form, supported from a number of the partner's International Learning Centres.

2.124 The review team tracked the University's processes for both the approval of the institutional partnership and also for the franchise of online versions of existing courses to the partner, following which detailed online delivery materials would be developed by the partner. The University's standard procedure for the approval of partnerships was followed, including inquiries pertaining to legal and financial due diligence on the partner. The subsequent legal agreement with the partner is quite clear on the necessity for any promotional material produced by the partner to be approved in advance of publication by the University. The team heard that key University academic staff were engaged within the partner's material development teams, and that materials would be signed off by the University before being provided to students.

2.125 The Concern referred to the review by QAA centred upon the unauthorised promotion, by one of the partner's international learning centres, of University courses apparently to be delivered in blended mode at the learning centre itself (see also C). The government of the country in which the learning centre was situated had not granted approval for the delivery of the University courses, either to the University itself, or its partner institution, or the partner's international learning centre.

2.126 Immediately following notification of the unauthorised advertisements, the University ensured that the adverts were removed, and conducted a thorough investigation into the circumstances with its partner. The investigation revealed that while a number of the partner's international learning centres were owned subsidiaries, others were independent organisations which were bound to the partner by agreements. These arrangements were not identified in the University's due diligence process, despite the fact that documents submitted for the institutional and course approval indicated that the University would be working with its partner towards the delivery of blended learning courses supported from the learning centres.

2.127 In its reading of documentary evidence, and its discussions with the University, the review team heard that the University had subsequently halted the development of blended delivery with its partner. The team was told that, before recommencing such work, the University will conduct full due diligence on any learning centre to be engaged in supporting the delivery of blended material, and will contractually formalise the relationship directly with the learning centre in question.

2.128 It is clear that, once aware of the unauthorised overseas advertisement, the University took firm action to halt both the advertisements, and, pending further investigation, to cease further development of blended material with the partner. Risk to the reputation of the University has thus been mitigated. However, notwithstanding the immediate robust action, the review team believes that, had the nature of the partner's relationship with its third-party learning centres been identified at the time due diligence was conducted, the difficulties would have been far less likely to occur. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University review its Due Diligence Policy and procedures to ensure that it scrutinises all organisations actually or potentially associated with provision leading to its awards.

2.129 The review team learned that one of the University's international ambitions (see page 4) is to develop a number of significant international partnerships which would embrace a number of different academic disciplines, including research, and leading to collaboration in the supervision of PhD students. While the research degree regulations enable such relationships, the regulations, the Framework and the procedures for establishing partnerships are silent on the approval and oversight processes that will be necessary to launch such a relationship. The University will no doubt wish to have developed its regulatory framework to accommodate such arrangements before formalising any agreements.

2.130 The University's Academic Plan and emerging Academic Blueprint both give priority to enhancing student employability and the University intends to ensure that in the future every student will be supported to 'undertake work-based learning within their programme...to achieve an agreed set of...Graduate Attributes', and further build upon its successful graduate employability achievements with over 93 per cent of graduates in employment or further study six months after graduation.

2.131 Clear, detailed and thorough procedures are in place for students undertaking structured work placements as part of their course, outlining the various roles of the University, employers and students, and giving a robust framework for the identification and

monitoring of placements to enable faculties and course teams to deliver consistent and meaningful high quality work-based learning. The review team read of the existing success of both professionally regulated placement programmes and embedded vocational placements.

2.132 A number of successful initiatives are being used to develop and showcase curriculum and work-based opportunities to develop student employability skills; the University is rightly proud of its GradEdge, High Flyers and Network75 schemes.

2.133 In discussions with students the review team learned that while formal embedded placements were successful, students seeking more general work experience opportunities within their course were less well supported and found fierce competition for placements. In meetings with the review team, staff acknowledged that the growth and subsequent sustainability of its various employability and work experience initiatives would require continuing focus.

2.134 Notwithstanding the particular issues in connection with one of the University's overseas partnerships (addressed above), the review team considered that, overall, learning opportunities with other organisations are implemented securely and managed effectively. On this basis the team concluded that the Expectation is met. However, the issues of due diligence noted above, until addressed in accordance with the team's recommendation (see paragraph 2.129), give rise to a moderate risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

**Expectation (B11): Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.**

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees***

#### **Findings**

2.135 The University's research strategy reflects its Academic Plan. Emphasis is placed on applied research impacting on people and the economy, and research informing teaching and curriculum development. The University has set targets for the 2020 Research Excellence Framework to increase the number of 3\* and 4\* staff submitted by 20 per cent, to increase recruitment of postgraduate research students by 20 per cent, and to double its research income.

2.136 Regulations for research degrees are outlined in the Framework, and defined in more detail in the Regulations for Research Degrees and the Code of Practice for Research Students. These can be accessed from the University's website and are provided to students at induction.

2.137 The University offers a small number of MA and MSc by Research courses but there is no reference to these awards or their regulatory framework within the Regulations. The Regulations also make reference to several named professional doctorate courses. However, there is no generic framework relating to the taught phase of these awards, including the amount of credit and the requirements for progression to the dissertation phase. (See A2.1.)

2.138 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by examining evidence relating to research degrees provided by the University. This included regulations, codes of practice and committee minutes. The team also examined information on the University's website and spoke with research students, supervisors, other academic and professional support staff.

2.139 The University's structures for managing its research degrees allow it to maintain institutional oversight while allowing for appropriate consideration and action of relevant matters at faculty level. Responsibility for the quality assurance of research degrees is devolved to Faculty Research Programmes Committees. These are responsible for approving applications, considering ethical issues and monitoring research students' progression. These all report to the RPSC which considers and approves examination arrangements and outcomes, external examiners reports and audits the annual monitoring of postgraduate research students. It also considers the outcomes of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the University's own internal survey. Institutional oversight is maintained by the QAC and the Research Committee, which receive reports from the RPSC.

2.140 The University's web pages provide helpful information covering all aspects of the application process and incorporate links to the Disability and Dyslexia Service. There are also links to specific information for international students and the Graduate Research Office. Procedures for considering applications involve the use of trained independent reviewers and ensure that offers are made only when it has been established that adequate support and supervisory arrangements are available and that the research proposed fits with the Faculty's research strategy. Research activity is concentrated in the University's

research institutes and centres, so that students are recruited into active research communities. Procedures also incorporate appropriate provision for consideration of ethical issues and, where appropriate, external frameworks for health and social care research. Students met by the review team confirmed that they all had appropriate access to any specialist resources they required for their research.

2.141 Students receive a comprehensive offer letter confirming their start date, fees and supervisory arrangements. To facilitate induction and annual monitoring processes there are now three intakes at fixed times each year.

2.142 The responsibilities of research students and their supervisors are clearly defined in the Code of Practice. All students are invited to and expected to attend a central induction event although part-time and distance learning students may access the information electronically. Students confirmed that entry requirements and fees are clear and that they had been interviewed by their supervisor during the application process. They also noted the helpful support they received from the Graduate Research Office during their induction.

2.143 The University has a Code of Practice for Research Supervisors which clearly defines the roles of Directors of Studies and Second Supervisors. The University requires experienced research student supervisors to update their knowledge and training every three years. This is monitored through the process for annual monitoring of research students and training records are maintained by the Graduate Research Office. However, the evidence provided to the review team indicated that for many supervisors the training records are incomplete. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the University ensure that all records of postgraduate research supervisor training are complete and fit for purpose.

2.144 The arrangements for monitoring the progress of individual research students are comprehensive. Directors of Studies complete an annual monitoring report on each student. The process is described in the Regulations for Research Degrees and at induction but would be further clarified to students by its inclusion in the Code of Practice for Research Students. All decisions about progression, including the upgrading of students from MPhil to PhD, are made independently at faculty level. The University participates in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey but also conducts its own annual internal survey in which response rates are higher, around 70 per cent. Feedback from this and other statistical information is used by the Graduate Research Office to compile a comprehensive and reflective annual monitoring report for each faculty and which leads to the production of an annual action plan.

2.145 Due to operational difficulties the University has recently discontinued its Postgraduate Certificate in Research module. However, the Graduate Research Office continues to provide the generic skills and research training component. The Graduate Research Office provides additional opportunities for students to develop their transferable skills and prepare for employment via a programme of seminars delivered in different parts of the campus and a series of readily accessible 'How to' guides. The students the review team met noted that the information and workshops provided by the Graduate Research Office were helpful and that its staff were supportive.

2.146 The University makes some limited use of postgraduate students in teaching. The Code of Practice for Research Students defines limits to the amount of teaching that students can undertake. PGR students who had been involved in teaching reported that they had mainly provided seminars and tutorials. Any marking activities had followed a defined scheme and had been moderated by the module leader.

2.147 Until the end of session 2013-14 each Faculty had a Postgraduate Research SVR on the RPSC. Following a review by the Executive, this role was discontinued and replaced

by volunteer representatives. However, two faculties no longer have any research student representatives. This is discussed further under B5.

2.148 Submission and examination processes are clearly defined in the Regulations for Research Degrees and the Code of Practice for Research Students. Examination arrangements, including the external examiner, must be approved by the RPSC, which also considers examiners' reports. The University plans to monitor more carefully the progress of its students so that it can increase the number of them completing their degree in a timely manner.

2.149 Procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals are detailed in the Code of Practice for Research Students and the Research Degree Regulations. The RPSC also monitors complaints and appeals as a standing agenda item.

2.150 The review team concludes that the University has an effective approach to the management and operation of its research degrees and systems in place to ensure the maintenance of its academic standards. However, the review team considers that the lack of appropriate representation of research students within its management structures and of opportunities for the student voice to be heard and responded to could present a risk to the student experience. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met overall, but the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**



## The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.151 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings to the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.152 Overall, the University meets its responsibilities for the quality of student learning opportunities. Good practice is identified in the University's guidance for the recognition of prior learning and the role of ULOs in current collaborative partnerships. However, some issues and risks remain in connection with the representation of postgraduate research students, the use of academic processes and monitoring procedures, the availability of external examiners' reports to students, due diligence procedures for collaborative partnerships, and research degree supervisor training records.

2.153 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

### **3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities**

**Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.**

#### **Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision**

##### **Findings**

3.1 Information about the University and its provision is accessible externally on the University's website, and internally on the intranet, UniLife and the VLE. Most of its published information has been or is under review, and is being changed, as a result of the merger.

3.2 These structures and frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested this by examining a range of information provided by the University, for current and prospective students, in hard-copy and digital formats, including the website and the VLE. The team also met undergraduate and postgraduate students, and academic and support staff.

3.3 The University operates a paperless admissions process through UCAS and clearly sets this out in the appropriate online pages. Throughout the enquiry and application journey detailed conversion plans are in place to advise potential students of all stages of the recruitment, selection and admission process and what actions are required of them in order to progress their enquiry or application to study.

3.4 Information about application to postgraduate taught courses is communicated to both potential applicants and their advisers through printed and online promotional material, alongside on and off campus events. The postgraduate promotional plan and conversion plan inform this activity. The Graduate Research Office offers a one-stop-shop for advice, guidance and information for PGR applicants; those who are successful receive comprehensively detailed offer letters, detailing expected start date, mode of study, names of their supervisors and Director of Studies plus information regarding enrolment/re-enrolment, fees and progression monitoring. Further information is provided for all PGR students through induction sessions, with backup information on USB sticks.

3.5 Clear information for prospective EU and international students is provided through the International and EU students' webpage, the EU Student Guide, and the International Student Guide. These guides provide full information for undergraduate and postgraduate applicants including details of the admission process, fees, and visa requirements. Open days provide face-to-face discussion opportunities with recruitment officers and recruitment agents, with further detailed information in printed materials.

3.6 UniLife plays a key role in providing students with extensive advisory information, dynamic updates, and interactive online tools to serve their needs. Advisory information covers the services available to students: library services, employability services, study skills provision and welfare, alongside broad student-life related topics. The dynamic content offers jobs feeds, 'classifieds' board, and campus, faculty and school updates. Interactive tools consist of students' email accounts, cloud storage, calendars, timetables, online appointments bookings, and self-service administration of student records and IT accounts. The UniLife mobile phone app offers a variety of information alongside effective live 'Ask a Librarian' and 'Ask a Disability Adviser' features. There is a job opportunities feature for part-

time, graduate, paid work-experience and volunteering opportunities. The app also offers rolling campus news and operates as a central hub for a variety of information and access to the library catalogue with effective search function with reservation capacity. The review team found that information on the student facing UniLife page was up to date, accurate and fit for purpose. The team was assured that mechanisms were in place to ensure the currency and accuracy of information on UniLife page.

3.7 The review team was told that students were given information about their modules on the VLE. However, the team found that module information is inconsistently detailed (except at the RWCMD, where students received accurate, accessible and up-to-date course information). The University is in the process of moving all module information to its new VLE.

3.8 Information on students' courses of study is not consistently made available to students at the start of their course or during their studies. This is not an issue at the RWCMD, which provides up-to-date and detailed course handbooks on its VLE, with a wide range of information including course specifications, the location of regulations, guidance on assessment and support services, and the names and affiliations of external examiners. However, across the rest of the University, course-level information is variable. Some students receive up-to-date and appropriate information in hardcopy handbooks or through the VLE, while other students have significantly out-of-date handbooks or no handbooks at all, in any format. The review team found that the VLE contained out-of-date course handbooks, and some course pages with no information at all (thus failing to adhere to the University's minimum requirements policy). The University recognises concerns about the provision of course handbooks and is taking action to address them. The team was told that, if the Course Handbook Regulations currently under consideration by F/CQACs are approved, PDF versions of course handbooks will be provided for all courses, housed in the VLE, and promoted through The Hub (a staff information source, equivalent to UniLife, which also serves as the VLE for the RWCMD), CELT, FLTECs and Academic Managers. These course handbooks will be produced by course leaders and signed off by Academic Managers. In view of this, the review team **affirms** the actions being taken to develop and publish specific handbooks for all courses.

3.9 The review team was assured that module and course information, on the VLE and otherwise, was the responsibility of module and course leaders respectively, and was managed on an ad-hoc basis through line management. The team were assured that this information was fit for purpose, accurate and up-to-date. Moreover, the University provided evidence to show that, when it has identified problems relating to incorrect or out-of-date information, it has the capacity to rectify them. However, noting this essentially reactive approach, the team found no evidence that module and course information was systematically audited to ensure its accuracy and currency. (The team noted a similarity in principle between this lack of systematic monitoring and the insufficient monitoring of assessment feedback performance noted under B6.) Accordingly, and taking into account issues discussed in paragraphs 3.13 to 3.17, the review team **recommends** that the University ensure that all information for prospective and current students is consistently accurate and meets the University's minimum requirements.

3.10 The review team found that course information on the University's ICIS database is not always accurate and current. Some course specifications are 'not available' or out-of-date. The database does not include some types of provision such as professional doctorates and some research degrees with taught components. (See also under Expectation A2.2, paragraph 1.26.)

3.11 The University provides graduates with certificates and transcripts for its awards, including those made through collaborative partnerships. To minimise the risk of forgeries, it

has strengthened the security features of its award documents. From this academic year all students are registered for the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), and delivered through the GradIntel software, providing a secure online record for students to access their detailed record of achievement. Data protection for HEAR is the responsibility of the University Secretary's Office.

3.12 The Student Submission identifies a number of inaccuracies in the information provided for students in connection with the rapid changes made as a result of the merger. The University is aware of these issues and recognises that there is often a time-lag in communicating post-merger changes. The review team was told that information of this kind remains under constant review, and it learned that the University is using both student and staff feedback in this process.

3.13 The QAA referred a Concern to the review team (pages 4-5) regarding the unauthorised promotion of University courses overseas by a collaborative partner. The circumstances are outlined under B10, which also addresses the due diligence aspects of this concern. Regarding the promotional material as such, the review found that it related to courses in a mode of delivery that the University had not approved for franchise to its partner, and had not approved for delivery with the support of the partner's third-party learning centre. The partner had accepted that it had neither approved any material for release by the learning centre, nor sought approval from the University for any such advertisements. While the communication channel between the University and its overseas partner appeared intact, the partner's third-party learning centre appeared to be acting with a high level of autonomy in respect of the University's courses.

3.14 While exploring the University's online presence, and that of its partner, the review team found that promotional material for courses to be delivered in partnership was mounted on an independent website which, albeit linked from the University's pages, was managed and populated by the partner. The website had adopted a brand which, in appearance and content, was almost indistinguishable from that of the University, and did not make clear the nature of the partnership between the University and its partner. In particular it was not clear that the tutors, and support for student study, would be provided mainly by the partner.

3.15 The review team learnt that the partner had been assiduous in seeking approval for site content, and in responding to University requests for change. However, the team considered that the lack of clarity regarding the nature of the partnership compromised the content's fitness for purpose. Similarly the team considered that the site did not provide sufficient information to help prospective students understand the academic environment in which they would be studying, nor to describe what provision would be made to enable their development and achievement. On this basis the team considered that the site might bring reputational risk to the University.

3.16 In the light of the unauthorised promotion of unauthorised advertising of courses by a centre not approved to deliver them, and the lack of appropriately detailed information contained within the partner's University-branded website, the review team **recommends** that the University ensure that information published by partners and third-party organisations, about provision leading to University awards, is consistently fit for purpose and trustworthy.

3.17 Notwithstanding the issues addressed by recommendations above, the review team concludes that, overall, the University produces information about its higher education provision that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy, and thus that this Expectation is met. However, until the recommendations are implemented in full, the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

## The quality of the information about learning opportunities: Summary of findings

3.18 In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.19 Overall, the University meets its responsibilities for the quality of information about learning opportunities. However, recommendations are made for improvement in connection with information for prospective and current students, and information published by partners and third-party organisations. Progress in the development of course handbooks is affirmed. Until these matters are fully addressed, some risks remain.

3.20 The review team concludes that the quality of information about learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

**Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.**

### Findings

4.1 The University defines academic enhancement as 'the process of taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities'. Responsibility for enhancement is delegated to the LTEC, which reports to the Academic Board. The RWCMD has its own LTEC, but a representative from the College sits on the University's LTEC. In addition, a member of the University sits on the College LTEC.

4.2 The University's quality assurance procedures allow enhancement themes to emerge from external examiners' reports and annual monitoring, review and revalidation of courses in the University and its partners. Students can also contribute to the identification of enhancement themes through module evaluations, internal and external surveys and via their representatives on University committees. Themes emerging in this way flow up to the LTEC through F/CLTECs.

4.3 The University also recognises the central role that academic staff can play in enhancement and supports this through its staff development processes, particularly the Reflection and Observation of Practice Scheme. This is facilitated by the CELT, which provides a range of support services, training and guidance to all members of the University of South Wales group to enhance learning and teaching.

4.4 These frameworks allow the Expectation to be met in theory. To test this, the review team scrutinised documentation and committee minutes relating to the identification, review and implementation of enhancement policies and procedures. It also discussed these with students, academic and support staff from the University and its partners.

4.5 A significant achievement following the merger has been the prompt development and introduction of new management structures and harmonised procedures and regulations for assuring the quality and standards of the University's awards. The University has now begun to review and realign its academic portfolio with the aim of creating campuses with academic distinction. The process is being overseen by a Programme Executive Board that is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and which reports direct to the Board of Governors. The Board includes representatives from all campuses, support services and a student representative. In addition to academic courses the process includes consideration of library and student support services.

4.6 The University has actively engaged with the HEA's 'Future Directions for higher education in Wales' programme as the lead institution on three themes. The 'Learning in Employment' workstrand identified how embedding work experience within the curriculum assists in preparing students for employment. The University has responded to this positively by including a requirement that all undergraduate courses incorporate work-related experience within its Academic Blueprint. Reflecting the outcomes of the Learning in Employment work strand, the Academic Plan also promotes staff engagement with business/industry, for example through the University's Strategic Insight Programme, so that staff gain a deeper appreciation of the needs of employers. The outcomes of the Students as Partners work strand fed into the University's review of its student representation scheme (see B5). It has also informed its approach to student engagement in the ongoing campus realignment work.

4.7 The University's Academic Board has endorsed a commitment for all academic staff becoming Fellows of the Higher Education Academy by 2020. This is being promoted through the University's annual staff appraisal schemes. Participation in training provided by CELT enables academic staff to gain recognition within the UK Professional Standards Framework up to the level of Principal Fellow. Grants are also available to support new teaching and learning initiatives.

4.8 The review team considers that the University takes planned and deliberate steps to identify and implement measures to enhance students' learning opportunities. It therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

## The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.9 In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.10 The review team considers that the University takes planned and deliberate steps to identify and implement measures to enhance students' learning opportunities. It therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

4.11 The review team judges that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.



## 5 Commentary on Internationalisation

### Findings

5.1 The University is relatively early in developing its general international presence, and is still developing its International Strategy. Its thinking is necessarily still immature, although informed and influenced by its history of international recruitment and development of international partnerships in its predecessor institutions. Some 14 per cent of the University's 33,000 students are of international or non-UK extraction. University awards and courses are delivered through 15 active collaborative partnerships with overseas institutions, and the University is seeking to build further partnerships of this kind (see page 4). Other agreements are in place for articulation and advanced standing, and staff-student exchanges.

5.2 Organisationally, the University has established a post of Pro Vice-Chancellor International within the University Executive, and one of the VCEB Sub-Groups is focused entirely upon International and UK Partnerships.

5.3 The narrative below indicates that the University is aware of the distance it has yet to travel, but at the same time also indicates that it is aware of where management and leadership effort needs to be addressed.

5.4 The University intimates that it has worked with HEFCW/Universities Wales, University Alliance and British Council to 'develop and build its knowledge and skills in this area' since it is relatively new to international work. In particular, its Academic Plan brings partnerships and international working to the heart of its mission in order to 'build on our ... global connections .... so as to add and share value to society and our economy in a meaningful and sustained way' and to 'Develop and implement the USW International Strategy to increase ... in-country international student recruitment'. In addition, the University draws specific attention to its work to align its approaches to the recognition of prior learning (RPL) with European, QAA and CQFW best practice.

5.5 The International Strategy, while still under consultation and benchmarking, has undergone several drafts, and publication is anticipated by Academic Board in the summer of 2015. It aims, among other things, to develop and expand international partnerships and on-campus international recruitment, to create sustainable academic and research collaborations, and to evolve the academic portfolio to meet the needs of the new globalised economy, and its strategic goals include becoming an international education provider of choice; increasing on-campus student recruitment; delivering high quality transnational education and research through long-term sustainable partnerships; internationalising the University curriculum; establishing a reputation as a partner of choice for international educational providers; delivering an exceptional international student experience; and establishing an internationally recognised brand for the delivery of distinctive online courses through a strategic partnership.

5.6 Work is already in hand in four areas in support of the emerging strategy: the ongoing recruitment of international students on campus; the recruitment of international students to online courses; delivery of University courses in partnership with international partners (transnational education); and internationalisation of the curriculum. In addition, the University indicated that the terms of reference of a number of other committees would embed the requirement to consider the University's international agenda in their work, although it would appear these additions have yet to be embedded.

5.7 In the year immediately following the merger the University conducted a thorough review of all its international partnerships, to ensure that all partnerships aligned properly

with the new *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code, that the academic foundations of the relationships remained sound, and that all teaching and assessment was conducted in either the English or Welsh languages. A number of relationships were closed as a consequence: all with sensitivity, and with appropriate support given to the students already studying there (see also B10).

5.8 The University has currently chosen not to validate courses designed by its partner institutions, preferring to franchise or deliver its own provision with the partner. The University's preference is to enter into partnerships in which there are elements of joint delivery of such courses, thus enabling a more direct engagement between the University's staff and the students, and already 13 partnerships involve elements of staff-student exchange.

5.9 The International Strategy aims to increase the number of international partnerships, in part to provide progression to study on campus at the University, but also to develop significant partnerships with sufficient breadth to enable sustainable academic and research relationships. A series of clear targets exists in order to measure progress in achieving these aims; the University would prefer to develop a small number of significant key partners rather than large numbers of small partnerships.

5.10 The VCEB International and UK Partnerships Group has been established to give direction to and monitor these developments. The group has the responsibility for making the business decisions relating to the development of potential new partners. All faculties are presently conducting a review of their portfolio of courses; opportunities for international developments have featured in these reviews.

5.11 Staff in the CQU provide support to faculties and partners throughout the development and operation of international partnerships. The principal conduit for academic support is between the ULOs and PLOs (see B10 for detail), and all international partnership courses are subject to detailed annual monitoring and periodic review in the same manner as 'home' courses (see also B10).

5.12 The University's portfolio review has brought the opportunity for faculties to better match their offer to the international demand. The University supports and advises candidates and applicants for its on-campus courses through a wide network of in-country representatives, recruitment agents, visits overseas by University staff and comprehensive web and published support material. The review team formed the opinion that The International and EU Students Guide would be particularly helpful, and applicants have further, direct support from the University's Immigration and International Student Advice team.

5.13 Applications are carefully tracked and monitored to ensure that the University remains within the regulatory framework of United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI) and that the University's Highly Trusted and Tier 4 status is not compromised. Data on admissions is reviewed for trends by the Tier 4 Compliance Group, and areas of concern have led, for example, to changes in the University's interview processes for international applicants.

5.14 A bespoke induction process for international students is offered, and students felt it worked well. Reviewers spoke to students on courses delivered in partner institutions overseas who all considered that their induction programme had been fit for purpose. The VCEB International and UK Partnerships Group is planning further enhancements to the transition and induction process for international students.

5.15 The University has acknowledged that greater focus should be brought to internationalising the curriculum. The review team read of the work of a number of

international SVRs, which recognises that the curriculum could be more internationally focused to prepare home students for global work and citizenship, and to ensure that it is more relevant for international students. The University intends to continue and build upon this work, and CELT has already provided a seminar on this. In the future, when approving or reviewing a new curriculum, validation panels will be asked to consider the internationalisation of the curriculum formally within the course approval process. The team considers that this initiative is timely; much of the curriculum may be brought forward for review following the Institutional Portfolio Review process.

5.16 The International Strategy has articulated the University's wish to develop an internationally recognised brand for online delivery. The University believes that moving forward in this area is important, and that it would be better progressed through the development of a strategic alliance with a partner with existing experience in the area. Such a partner has recently been identified (see B10 for details), and its first internationally delivered online courses for international students should be launched within several months.

5.17 The University employs a number of mechanisms for engaging with students in order to measure their overall experience (see B5). While these clearly provide a sightline upon the broader experience, the University is yet to consistently disaggregate the feedback in order to analyse detailed feedback from its nearly 900 international students on campus (the majority in the faculties of Business and Society and Computing, Engineering and Science).

5.18 The Student Submission notes that international students found that the International Welcome programme gave them a useful insight into the University and living in Wales. However, it also notes that a more comprehensive induction for international students, focusing on academic practices and providing guidance on referencing and plagiarism would be useful. It also reports that many overseas students feel that work placements are not available for them due to visa restrictions.

5.19 Since its formation the University has been working hard to grow its expertise in the international arena. It has developed a new International Strategy which includes the development of new international partnerships, the growth of the number of international students studying at the University, and internationalising the curriculum. It has thoroughly reviewed and rationalised its portfolio of academic international partners but has ambition to extend it with the careful addition of strategically important new partnerships which will include a wider range of activities, including research as well as course delivery.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 19-21 of the [Higher Education Review: Wales handbook](#).

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality).

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx).

### Academic standards

The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

### Award

A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

### Blended learning

Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

### Credit(s)

A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

### Degree-awarding body

A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

### Distance learning

A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'.

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

### **Enhancement**

The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

### **Expectations**

Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

### **Framework for higher education qualifications**

A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS).

### **Good practice**

A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

### **Learning opportunities**

The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

### **Learning outcomes**

What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

### **Multiple awards**

An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

### **Operational definition**

A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

### **Programme (of study)**

An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

**Programme specifications**

Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

**Public information**

Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

**Quality Code**

Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

**Reference points**

Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

**Subject Benchmark Statement**

A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to Bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

**Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)**

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

**Threshold academic standard**

The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

**Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

**Widening participation**

Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

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