

# Student Guide for QAA Reviews in Wales

February 2022



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*This Guide is published in both Welsh and English*

## 1 Who we are and what we do



### Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

[Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\)](#) is a UK-wide organisation with a mission to safeguard academic standards and improve the quality of UK higher education wherever it is delivered around the world. We check that students get the higher education experience they are entitled to expect. QAA is independent of governments, funding bodies and providers of higher education.



### QAA Cymru

QAA Cymru is responsible for developing quality assurance requirements and enhancement opportunities specific to the sector in Wales. QAA Cymru develops and implements the external review process for higher education providers and supports them with their own quality assurance and enhancement processes. QAA undertakes external quality assurance reviews on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW).

Currently, there are two types of review for higher education providers in Wales. The Gateway Quality Review: Wales (GQRW) is for providers who want to evidence they meet requirements of specific course designation in Wales for student support or who are seeking regulation by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). For providers already regulated by HEFCW, a Quality Enhancement Review (QER) ensures providers meet the standards of higher education in Wales (including relevant UK-agreed baseline requirements). Each review method has a comprehensive dedicated Review Handbook setting out the details of the review.

## 2 Purpose of this guide

This guide is primarily intended to support students, student representatives, Lead Student Representatives (LSR) and members of staff who support students when engaging with a QAA Cymru-led review. Information related to student engagement within these review processes is drawn together from the Review Handbooks which can be accessed on the QAA [website](#). It covers the method, roles and responsibilities, especially the responsibilities of students and how they can fully contribute to the review processes.

At the time of writing, there are two current review methods for Wales:

**Gateway Quality Review: Wales (GQRW)** and **Quality Enhancement Review (QER)**.

The timeline and stages for each review vary but there are similar engagement activities for students. This guide is designed to provide an overview of student engagement in a review and help students and providers plan their preparation for review. It is designed to maintain relevance if a review method is varied and should be read in conjunction with the relevant Review Handbook.

Students play a critical role in the quality assessment of higher education. Although student engagement and representation vary across providers, partnership and collaboration between students and the provider are central to QAA review methods and the higher education in Wales. This guide has a particular emphasis on students working in partnership with the provider. The Lead Student Representative (LSR) will lead student engagement and representation in the review process and involve student representatives and the wider student community during the review process. Although students and the provider have distinct roles, each review process enables various forms of collaboration when developing the relevant components, such as the provider self-assessment and student submission, as well as co-developing action plans and implementations of potential recommendations arising from the review.

This guide intentionally does not replace the Review Handbooks for the relevant review method but offers supplementary advice to equip students to fully engage throughout the review process the provider is undertaking. If you have a specific query relating to the review process you can contact QAA Cymru at [ARCAdmin@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:ARCAdmin@qaa.ac.uk)

Throughout this guide, universities and colleges are referred to as providers. The language used in reviews can become technical, therefore a glossary that lists key definitions and terms used in relation to the review processes ([Annex 1](#)) has been included at the end of the guide. The Review Handbooks also have a 'Definition of key terms' annex which can be used alongside the glossary provided in this guide. Additionally, there is a [QAA glossary](#) with a wider range of terms used in quality assurance and enhancement.

## 3 Higher education reviews in Wales

QAA Cymru-led review methods are specifically developed for higher education in Wales. The regulatory system of higher education in Wales is distinct from that of Northern Ireland, Scotland and England but is part of what is referred to as UK higher education. That means the higher education sectors of the four nations are devolved and each have a regulatory system which aligns with specific agreed reference points that ensure approaches to the quality of qualifications, learning and teaching are common across the UK. For higher education in Wales the regulator and funding body is the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). The use of *external reference points* when talking about reviews and review methods demonstrates that quality assurance of UK higher education is part of a wider system of agreed practice. The main reference points can be found in this section as well as high-level information on how the reviews sit within the higher education sector in Wales and the UK. The information contains various names of documents, organisations and other technical terms for which a glossary is provided in [Annex 1](#).

### 3.1 Review methods in the context of Wales and the UK

Both the Gateway Quality Review: Wales (GQRW) and the Quality Enhancement Review (QER) provide distinctive approaches to external quality assurance reviews in Wales. The methods were developed by QAA Cymru in collaboration with providers in Wales, Universities Wales and ColegauCymru to meet the requirements of HEFCW and to address the context of the higher education sector in Wales. Under the [Higher Education \(Wales\) Act 2015](#), HEFCW is required to assess the quality of higher education facilitated in Wales by, or on behalf of, each regulated provider.

Gateway Quality Review: Wales (GQRW) is a review process which establishes that a provider meets the baseline requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales (QAF). Successful outcomes of GQRW could inform an application for specific designation in Wales. GQRW is also the process through which providers have the opportunity to apply to become 'regulated' by HEFCW after two successful reviews.

Quality Enhancement Review (QER) is the process by which HEFCW continues to ensure regulated providers meet the standards of higher education in Wales (including relevant UK agreed baseline requirements). The overall aim of QER is to inform a provider's governing body, students, HEFCW and the wider public whether it meets relevant baseline expectations of the QAF - including how it sets and maintains academic standards; maintains a high-quality academic experience; and supports the emphasis in the QAF on improving student outcomes and the student academic experience.

Providers with satisfactory outcomes are eligible to use a QAA graphic. This graphic is intended for providers to use on their websites and promotional material to demonstrate to prospective and current students, the public and other stakeholders that they have met or exceeded the UK expectations for quality and standards in their QAA review.

### 3.2 Key reference points

The [Quality Assessment Framework for Wales](#) (QAF) sets out HEFCW's model for quality assessment that is underpinned by a set of baseline regulatory requirements consisting of external reference points in the higher education landscape. These reference points include [The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland](#) (FHEQ); the [Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales](#) (CQFW); and the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (Quality Code). The QAF also includes activities that engage students such as triennial assurance reviews, annual review of data from the National

Student Survey (NSS), and annual assurance statements from governing bodies of providers, which normally include student members.

<b>Baseline requirements as set out in the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales</b>
<b>The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)</b> The FHEQ sets out a hierarchy of qualification levels and states the generic requirements for qualifications to be awarded at each of these levels. The frameworks show which qualifications are at the same level and indicate how one qualification may lead to another, either at the same or a higher level.
<b>Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)</b> The CQFW describes the qualifications system in Wales including work-based learning, further education and higher education. The CQFW illustrates progression into higher education and describes credit accumulation and how providers can facilitate credit transfer.
<b>The UK Quality Code for Higher Education</b> The Quality Code sets out the fundamental principles of academic standards and quality, emphasising the role of providers in assuring the quality of the experience they offer to students, supporting student engagement, and ensuring external referencing is used to ensure the integrity of awards and the quality of provision. This applies to both English and Welsh medium provision. The Quality Code sets out Expectations and Core and Common practices which clearly and succinctly express the outcomes providers should achieve in setting and maintaining the standards of their awards, and for managing the quality of their provision.

### 3.3 Welsh language commitments

When planning, conducting and reporting on reviews in Wales, QAA Cymru is committed to treating the Welsh and English languages as equal. This means that QAA considers the Welsh Language standards as they apply to us under the *Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011* and may conduct parts of reviews in Welsh with simultaneous translation from Welsh to English. Providers may submit their self-assessment and any other documentation in either or both languages at their discretion. The student submission may also be submitted in either or both languages. QAA Cymru also seeks to recruit bilingual reviewers and review managers. The QAA Officer will ensure that language preferences are agreed at initial stages. The agreed language preferences consider both the language in which the review will be conducted and the language preferences of the individual participants of the review. All documentation and reports relating to the review is produced in both languages.

There is further information on the Welsh language in the review methods in the Review Handbooks. QAA's [compliance notice](#) is also available on the website.

## 4 Key stages of student involvement in a review

This section provides a general overview of the stages within a QAA Cymru review and the range of opportunities for student involvement. The review processes are designed to ensure that students receive a high-quality academic experience and that the academic standards are set and remain secure. This means that degrees achieved at these providers are comparable across providers in Wales as well as the UK, and retain value over time.

### Students can participate in the review processes by:

- nominating a Lead Student Representative (LSR) who is involved throughout the review
- creating the student submission and promoting student engagement - led by the LSR
- contributing to the student submission through description of the academic experience and student involvement in quality assurance at the provider
- ensuring the student submission reflects student views
- working in partnership with the provider throughout the review process
- being involved in the preparation of the provider self-assessment
- keeping staff aware of the development of the student submission or other student-led contributions.

At the time of writing this guide, there are two review methods for Wales - Gateway Quality Review: Wales (GQRW) and Quality Enhancement Review (QER). The timeline and stages for each review vary. As described above, this guide is designed to support students for both the current methods and continue to be appropriate if a review method is varied so the guidance should be read in conjunction with the relevant Review Handbook.

### 4.1 Student engagement and contributions in a QAA review

QAA Cymru is committed to actively encouraging student participation and engagement in the review process. The effectiveness of how students and provider work together on quality assurance and enhancement is a significant focus within QAA reviews. Partnerships should be equal and based on mutual respect, shared goals and use the different skills, knowledge, expertise and capabilities that each bring to the partnership. In quality enhancement, it has become established practice that students are equal partners in the formulation, implementation, operation and evaluation of the quality assurance approach taken by a provider.

Each Review Team must consider the views of students studying at the provider at the time of review and explore the effectiveness of how the provider works in partnership with the full diversity of the student body. The Review Team will be particularly interested in the approach taken to involve students in learning experiences.

Students have the opportunity to develop their own student submission, develop one jointly with the provider or contribute to the provider's self-assessment.

## 4.2 The key stages of a review

Although each review method is bespoke, and currently GQRW differs in its approach to QER, each review process will have five key stages for student involvement:

- 1 Initial contact between QAA and the provider
- 2 Early preparation and submission
- 3 Preparing for the onsite visit(s)
- 4 Onsite visit(s)
- 5 Reporting the outcomes.

Each of these stages will be an important part of the review process, although they may be titled or described differently and will have varying timescales depending on the review method. The stages are summarised in Table 1. Each stage offers important opportunities for student engagement and participation and these are described in more detail below. Additional to the content below relating to each key stage, there is a separate guidance on the student submission (Section 5). There is also a section on roles within a review for ready reference (Section 6).

### 4.2.1 Initial contact between QAA and the provider

Initially, QAA Cymru will contact the provider to give notice of the forthcoming review and identify a timescale for the review. QER has an extended duration with the first contact being made up to 18 months before the review is due to take place and a provider briefing approximately 12 months prior to the review. For GQRW, initial contact is at least 15 weeks before the review.

The initial contact is an opportunity for the provider and students to begin their review arrangements. The provider considers who will act as Facilitator - the lead staff member to communicate with QAA and the Review Team, and to liaise with staff and students. The students consider who will be the Lead Student Representative (LSR) - the lead student to communicate with QAA and the Review Team, and liaise with students, staff and the Facilitator. The LSR is an equal role to the Facilitator and this represents the partnership approach of the review.



**Table 1: Key stages of student involvement in a review**

Stage	QAA	Provider	Students
<b>Initial contact between QAA and the provider</b>	QAA contacts the provider about the arrangements for the relevant review method	Provider nominates a Facilitator	Students identify a Lead Student Representative (LSR)
	Language preferences of the provider and individual participants are identified for the conduct of the review		
<b>Early preparation and submission</b>	QAA undertakes initial provider assessment; QAA arranges a provider briefing* which could be face-to-face or virtual; QAA confirms length of the onsite review visit(s) and confirms the Review Team membership	Provider attends briefing; provider prepares and uploads self-assessment and supporting evidence	LSR attends briefing; students prepare the student submission** (this will be uploaded at the same time as the provider self-assessment)
<b>Preparing for the onsite visit(s)</b>	Review Team undertakes desk-based analysis; Review Team holds team meeting and QAA informs the provider of the schedule of the visit, who the Team wishes to meet and any request for additional evidence	Provider prepares for the onsite review visit(s)	LSR prepares for the onsite review visit(s)
<b>Onsite visit(s)</b>	The onsite visit(s) takes place***	Meetings of provider staff and the Review Team	Meetings of students and the Review Team
<b>Reporting the outcomes</b>	Moderation of findings; draft report sent to the provider	Provider and LSR comment on factual accuracy	
	Final report produced; Judgements and report sent to HEFCW; report published on QAA's website	Provider considers findings and any appropriate actions - creation of action plan	Students consider findings and any appropriate actions - work in partnership with provider to create action plan

\*For QER, QAA Cymru will contact the provider approximately one year before the review is due to take place. The provider will explore the required scope of the review with QAA and how it would like to contextualise and tailor the review in light of its mission, student profile and strategic priorities. The preparatory meeting will normally take place between 11 and 27 weeks before the review is due to take place, depending on the review method.

\*\* There is more information about the student submission in Section 5, but it is important to refer to the relevant Review Handbook to ensure the requirements are met and to identify opportunities to use existing documents and data sets and/or prepare submissions in an alternative format.

\*\*\*Depending on the type of review, there may be an initial visit from the Review Team - this is typical for QER. The substantive onsite review visit may last approx. 2 days (for GQRW) or up to 5 days (for QER). The number of visits and their likely duration will be given in the relevant Review Handbook.

Choosing the LSR is an important task for students. The LSR should be someone who has an opportunity to represent the views of the diverse student body, although views are usually gathered through a range of existing means - the LSR is not expected to undertake bespoke student surveys, for example, to fulfil the LSR role. For providers with a well-established and active students' union (SU) or equivalent, a SU Officer typically takes on the role of LSR.

#### **Consider these tips/suggestions**

- If there is no SU or equivalent, the LSR may be chosen from the pool of student representatives, or a member of staff may approach student representatives for nominations and/or volunteers.
- A group of student representatives can agree to work together and nominate one lead representative to act as the LSR.
- The LSR can consider ways in which the tasks can be shared among fellow students - maybe SU officers.
- Staff may be able to provide support for the LSR.
- Two student representatives can share the LSR role - please keep the QAA Officer informed if that is the case.
- The provider may be able to offer the services of a central or departmental administrator to support the LSR.
- If help is not offered the LSR should ask for support from the Facilitator.

The decision to appoint the role to an individual may be agreed at an SU meeting.

The LSR should not be a member of staff, although this may be acceptable if they are also a current student at the provider - the relevant Review Handbook will contain guidance if a member of staff is considering acting as the LSR.

Depending on the review method, it is possible that the LSR will no longer be a student at the provider by the time of the review visit. Therefore, it may be important to consider who can take over at a later time, such as in the next academic year, and plan appropriate handover activities. There is more information about this in Section 6.

#### **4.2.2 Early preparation and submission**

There may be one or two meetings of the QAA Officer with the provider. These may be called a provider or preparatory meeting, and the focus of each meeting is set out in the relevant Review Handbook. These provider meetings can be either face-to-face or virtual. At the meeting(s), the duration of the onsite visit(s) and Review Team members are confirmed. The deadline for submission of evidence from both the provider and students is confirmed by the QAA Officer along with the logistics for the visit(s). Once the date for the onsite visit(s) is confirmed, QAA Cymru expects the provider to disseminate that information to the student body and inform them of how students can contribute and engage with the review process. It is good practice for the LSR and Facilitator to work together to agree on ways in which students can be informed and involved and identify support for the LSR.

The LSR can use the provider meeting(s) as an opportunity to liaise with the QAA Officer about the student submission and how students will be selected for meetings with the Review Team. There is further information about the student submission in Section 5. Student selection is the responsibility of the LSR but they may choose to work in partnership with the Facilitator or student colleagues.

It is helpful for the LSR to discuss with the QAA Officer the number of meetings with students that are likely to be held and the number of preferred participants in each meeting - while the Review Team will want to meet with a representative group of students, one from each programme is likely to be too many for meaningful discussion; equally, just a handful of students is unlikely to provide good representation. Typically, the Review Team will want to meet with a wide selection of students including undergraduates and postgraduates, where the provider has postgraduate provision. The LSR will want to consider selecting students from across the subject departments, both full-time and part-time, and in different years of study. It can be helpful to create a matrix to support the selection process and ensure good representation across the institution.

After the briefing, staff and students prepare and upload the provider self-assessment, student submission and supporting evidence in line with requirements set out in the Review Handbook and deadlines agreed with the QAA Officer.

### **4.2.3 Preparing for the onsite visit(s)**

Before the onsite visit, the Review Team conduct a desk-based analysis of the provider self-assessment and student submission. Depending on the review method, additional data provided by HEFCW where available, and other contextual information will be considered as summarised in the relevant Review Handbook. The Review Team has a virtual meeting to discuss its analysis and prepare for the onsite visit(s) and meeting. The Review Team may request additional evidence at this stage.

The provider self-assessment and the student submission should be shared with the students selected to meet with the Review Team.

It is helpful for the LSR to arrange a briefing event for student representatives before the Review Visit. This is an opportunity to summarise the review process and student involvement. At this time any topics that were agreed as areas of focus at the provider meeting(s) can be shared and discussed. This is a good opportunity for the student representatives to ask questions about the process, the review visit or the student submission. The LSR may seek help from the Facilitator or other senior staff to work in partnership to help arrange this type of event and to support the briefing. A list of questions intended as prompts to help students in their writing of the student submission are collected in [Annex 2](#). This list may also be useful for student briefings as a guide to the 'type' of questions that may be asked in meetings with the Review Team.

It is usual for some of the selected students to drop out - for instance, due to illness or other commitments - so it is useful to keep track of numbers and invite stand-ins as appropriate. As the Review Visit approaches, a LSR may feel under pressure. At this time, it is important that the LSR seeks support from fellow students and the Facilitator. A checklist of activities is provided in [Annex 3](#) to support the LSR's organisation and preparation.

### **4.2.4 Onsite visit(s)**

The onsite visit(s) enables the Review Team to meet staff, students and other stakeholders, as appropriate to the review. The duration of the main onsite review visit will depend on the review method. Typically, for GQRW the onsite visit lasts for two days, while for QER the visit is normally three to five days - this may vary depending on the initial provider assessment.

The QAA Officer will share a schedule for the onsite visit with the Facilitator and LSR. This schedule will outline the Review Team's activities including proposed meetings with students. Once this is received, the LSR should confirm the students who will attend each meeting. There may be some changes and some students may no longer be required and

some may not be available for meetings, especially if times have changed. The LSR should confirm meeting days, times and venues with the relevant students.

As noted above, there is a selection of potential questions that the Review Team may ask in the meetings with students in Annex 2. However, it is important for all students who meet with the Review Team to stay alert and answer the questions that are asked because they may have a specific focus based on the Review Team's lines of enquiry. It is important that students are open and honest with the Review Team. The Review Team is very keen to hear the views of students and what it is like to be a student at the provider. If there is a concern, this should be anonymised. No individual student's comments will be reported back to the provider; however, students should provide answers and accounts based on typical student experience and not focus on isolated incidents that may have affected themselves personally.

It is normal for meetings with the Review Team to take place in person. However, as a result of the Covid pandemic, institutions and individuals have become familiar with and adept at virtual meetings. Therefore, some meetings may take place virtually, especially where in-person meetings are impracticable. For example, when transnational education (TNE) provision is under review, there might be a virtual meeting with overseas branch campuses or delivery partners, including staff and students. Similarly, the use of a virtual meeting as part of the review of an institution with multiple campuses may enable more students to take part. The use of virtual meetings should be discussed and agreed with the QAA Officer prior to the review visit.

During the visit, the Review Team will be in daily contact with the LSR and the Facilitator to clarify any evidence or provide further information. The LSR and the Facilitator may also suggest informal meetings with the Review Team to alert them to any information which may be useful to the review.

The review visit includes a 'final meeting' between the Review Team, senior staff of the provider, the LSR and the Facilitator. Details of the final meeting are provided in the relevant Review Handbook. The meeting enables the provider to offer any clarification and present evidence that may support the Review Team in their deliberations, judgements and findings.

At the end of the visit the Review Team will have a private meeting to discuss the findings and agree its judgements. The LSR and Facilitator are not invited to this meeting but may be given non-binding verbal feedback, depending on the review method.

#### **4.2.5 Reporting the outcomes**

When the review has been completed, the provider will receive a report which covers the judgements of the review. The judgements for each review method are set out clearly in the relevant Review Handbook. Currently, the judgements used in QER and GQRW differ.

##### **QER judgements**

- Meets requirements
- Meets requirements with conditions
- Does not meet requirements

'Meets requirements' is a positive outcome from QER. Judgements of 'meets requirements with conditions' and 'does not meet requirements' are unsatisfactory outcomes. A condition indicates there is one or more substantial matters of concern and follow-up action will be required to complete the review. If the provider receives an unsatisfactory judgement, it will need to develop and implement an action plan to remedy the weaknesses. The action plan

should be produced in partnership with the student representative body. QAA Cymru will support providers to complete an action plan, monitoring progress within agreed timescales, and confirm that actions taken have had a positive impact. This may include a follow-up meeting with the provider. It is possible to reverse unsatisfactory judgements after a 12-month period. Where judgements are revised to 'meets requirements', the review is deemed successful.

A satisfactory review outcome may be accompanied by one or more recommendations made by the review team to strengthen and safeguard the provider's practices in relation to academic standards and the quality of the student academic experience. A recommendation indicates a weakness or potential area of concern, such as relating to a procedure or process. Providers will be expected to develop and implement an action plan to address the recommendations and students should have the opportunity to participate in this process.

In addition to the overall judgements, the Review Team may 'commend' aspects of the provision. This is a recognition of a practice that makes a particularly positive contribution to the student academic experience. Providers can subsequently be supported by QAA Cymru to share good practice more widely; this is often achieved through the production of case studies which may be prepared in partnership with students.

After moderation and checks for factual accuracy, the review report(s) and judgements will be published on the QAA website in English and Welsh. Full details of the reporting process can be found in the Review Handbook.

#### **GQRW judgements**

- Confidence
- Limited confidence
- No confidence

GQRW judgements of 'confidence' are considered satisfactory. Judgements of 'limited confidence' and 'no confidence' are considered unsatisfactory. An unsatisfactory judgement indicates that compliance with one or more of the relevant baseline quality requirements for higher education in Wales has not been met.

Where a provider has received a judgement of 'limited confidence' or 'no confidence' in one or both of the judgement areas, the provider will be required to develop an action plan that addresses the areas for development and specified improvements identified. This should be produced in partnership with the student body and signed off by the head of the provider.

After moderation and checks for factual accuracy, the final review report and judgements will be sent to HEFCW and the report will be published on the QAA website in English and Welsh. Full details of the reporting process can be found in the Review Handbook.

## 5 Preparing a student submission

Student contributions provide invaluable insights to the Review Team. The student submission is key evidence for the Review Team's desk-based analysis because it is an independent piece of evidence which has been created by students to represent the views of the student body. The student submission should help the Review Team understand what it is like to be a student at the provider, and how the provider and student body work in partnership. It provides wider perspectives on the experiences of students alongside other evidence, such as data and the provider self-assessment. The Review Team is interested in understanding how students are engaged in decision-making, quality assurance and quality enhancement processes and how this impacts on their student experience. A list of questions intended as prompts to help students in their writing of the student submission are collected in [Annex 2](#).

### The student submission should:

- ✓ represent views of the diverse student body
- ✓ be an opportunity for the student representative body to evaluate and conclude how the provider works in partnership with students
- ✓ evaluate how the provider responds to student concerns and contributions when deliberating and designing academic programmes, policies and processes
- ✓ be evidence-based and explain the sources of evidence that inform the comments and conclusions made
- ✗ not name or discuss the competency of individual members of staff
- ✗ not include any reference to personal grievances
- ✓ also be an opportunity for students to draw to the attention of the Review Team processes or practices that work particularly well that the Review Team may wish to consider as area(s) of good practice
- ✓ be concise.

Regardless of the type or format of the student submission, if made separately from the provider self-assessment, it should include a statement explaining how it was compiled, who was involved, and the extent to which its content has been shared and endorsed by the student representative body.

There is no indicative or 'ideal' length for a student submission. It can be helpful to use some or all of the headings provided for the provider self-assessment, but these do not need to be followed. Although student submissions are predominantly in written format, other formats such as video, presentations, podcasts, or a combination of these may be used as well - [Annex 4](#) provides a guide for alternative submissions. Students may also contribute commentaries in a vignette-style to the provider self-assessment or develop a fully integrated provider and student submission. The latter must be clearly signed by the LSR.

Students can also contribute student-led case studies alongside the provider self-assessment. Although not all student representative bodies produce Annual Quality Reports, these can summarise challenges and solutions which have been identified and provide evidence for the review.

The student submission is a significant piece of evidence in the review and it will, therefore, often involve discussion with staff who may support students in the development process. There is an expectation of transparency in the review which means that both provider and students will share materials produced for the review before it is uploaded to the QAA secure electronic site. It should also avoid including comments from individual students who may not be representative of a wider group.

## 5.1 Selecting evidence

QAA Cymru encourages students to use external datasets which are publicly available and other data available from the provider to provide evidence for the insights in the student submission. QAA Cymru can help direct students to available data as part of the preparatory stages of the review. Evidence may be found in existing information, survey results and recorded outcomes of meetings with staff and students. It should not be necessary to conduct surveys especially for the student submission. Students may wish to comment on the outcomes of the National Student Survey for their provider, or information on completion rates, graduate outcomes or graduate destinations. Students may also consider other data or information which supports points raised in the student submission. QAA Cymru encourages the provider to support its students in finding and engaging with evidence.

Examples of evidence are provided in Figure 1 - these are not exclusive and are not presented in any order of priority or importance. Each provider will have its own set of evidence to inform the student submission.

### Figure 1: Examples of evidence to inform the student submission

- Student representative structure and number of active student representatives
- National Student Survey data
- Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) data
- Internal (provider-led) survey data
- Minutes and information shared at meetings involving students such as quality assurance committees, boards of study, student-staff liaison committees - the names and terms of reference of committees and groups will vary across providers
- Strategies, policies and procedures - for example, Student Engagement Strategy, Student Engagement Policy, Student Charter
- Student-led teaching awards
- Student involvement in provider initiatives such as widening participation, review of assessment methods, support for BAME and/or other underrepresented students
- Case studies - short evaluative pieces to evidence a particular activity - for example, development or updating of provider-facilitated internships
- Outcomes of any student-led campaigns or initiatives that have enhanced the student experience - for example, longer library opening hours

Student submissions should be shared through the QAA secure electronic site. The approximate deadline for uploading the submission will be detailed in the Review Handbook and the appointed QAA Officer will confirm the precise date. If in doubt, the LSR can contact [QAA Cymru](#).

## 6 Roles within reviews

This section provides an overview of the main roles and responsibilities within the review processes. The roles are common across GQRW and QER review methods but there may be variations in the associated responsibilities. Refer to the relevant Review Handbook to clarify responsibilities for a specific method.

### 6.1 Students and the Lead Student Representative

The student representative body has an essential role in supporting student engagement during the review and is invited to nominate a Lead Student Representative (LSR). Students can have input into the process through attendance at meetings before and during the review visit, nominating an LSR, preparing and contributing to the student submission, and developing and implementing the action plan after the review.

The LSR is important to the review process because they help to ensure smooth communication between the student body, the provider and QAA. During the review, the LSR will meet with the Review Team and is responsible for liaising with the Facilitator to ensure consistent communication between the student body and the provider. It is expected that the LSR receives copies of key correspondence from QAA Cymru. The LSR and Facilitator are also expected to work together to disseminate information about the review.

#### Key actions for the LSR are:

- to oversee and coordinate the student submission and other student contributions as agreed with the provider
- to assist in the selection of students who will meet the Review Team during the visit and ensure continuity of student activity throughout the review process
- when the draft report is shared with the provider, the LSR coordinates comments from the student body on the draft report and works with the provider to develop an action plan based on the review findings.

Where it is not possible to identify an LSR, QAA Cymru expects to meet students and student representatives, at each key stage of the review process. If an LSR is not nominated or is not nominated in the early stages of the review, QAA Cymru requires a clear point of contact with a representative of the student body. Where no formal student representative body exists, the provider should support students to identify a volunteer from the student body.

The LSR role is voluntary and the LSR should be appointed by the students themselves, with support from a student representative body such as the SU or equivalent within the provider. Some providers do not have a formal students' union or equivalent but providers are encouraged to find ways to engage with students during the process. If the LSR role is shared between two student representatives, the provider should let the QAA Officer know.

QAA Cymru will provide advice and guidance for LSRs at the relevant provider meeting(s), which includes advice on the review process and the national context in which it takes place. As the LSR role is significant and the student submission adds value to the process, it is expected that the provider supports the LSR throughout the process. This support includes administrative and logistical support as appropriate and needed during the review.



### 6.1.1 Handover between Lead Student Representatives

If the LSR changes during the review process, it is important to make sure that a proper handover is provided. This is to provide consistency and ensure student contributions are not affected by any changes that may occur. The student representative body and the provider should work together to ensure that an effective handover is facilitated between the outgoing and the incoming LSRs, and that the QAA Officer is kept informed of changes.

Likewise, any annual handover of students' union officers, or equivalent, should include any actions and initiatives which have arisen from a previous review and how these are addressing challenges agreed by predecessors in the student body. It may be useful to record and include information on why certain decisions did or did not work in practice so that lessons learnt are not lost between incoming and outgoing student representatives. The handover also provides an opportunity for celebration of achievements led by students and in partnership with the provider.

## 6.2 Facilitator

The provider is invited to nominate a single member of staff who will facilitate the review in liaison with the QAA Officer and the LSR. Like the responsibilities of the LSR, the Facilitator ensures that the organisation of the review and related communications are consistent. During the onsite visit(s) the Facilitator is expected to provide the Review Team with advice and guidance on provider structures, policies, priorities and procedures. This role helps to direct the reviewers to information to help make the process as time efficient as possible.

## 6.3 Protocols for the LSR and Facilitator

Protocols for the LSR and Facilitator are set out in the relevant Review Handbook. While both should observe the review process objectively, neither should act as an advocate for the provider or a particular view. They may bring additional information to the attention of the Review Team and/or seek to correct a factual inaccuracy. It is for the Review Team to decide how information is best used during the review. Both roles are required to observe the same conventions of confidentiality as those of the Review Team. If appropriate and confidentiality is observed, notes may be made of discussions with the Review Team and reported back to students and staff if this provides a good understanding of the matters raised.

LSR and Facilitator should:	Neither should:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ observe the review process objectively</li><li>✓ communicate clearly with the Review Team and the QAA Officer</li><li>✓ assist the provider or student body in understanding matters raised by the Review Team</li><li>✓ correct factual inaccuracies if they arise</li><li>✓ observe the conventions of confidentiality</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✗ act as an advocate for the provider or a particular view</li><li>✗ use any information gained in the review in a manner that allows individuals to be identified</li></ul>

The relevant Review Handbook will set out the protocols for attendance at meetings. Where the LSR and/or the Facilitator is in attendance, they should observe the meeting only and

not participate unless invited to do so by the Review Team. The LSR and Facilitator can take notes during meetings but should treat these as confidential. The Review Team has the right to request that the LSR and/or Facilitator disengage from the process at any point during the review process. This may be done if it is considered that there is a conflict of interest, or that the presence of either will inhibit discussions.

Meetings	LSR	Facilitator
Review Team meetings with students	✓	X
Review Team meetings with staff	✓ if agreed by the Review Team	✓
Final meeting of Review Team, as relevant to the Review Method	✓	✓
Private meetings of the Review Team	✓ if agreed by the Review Team	✓ if agreed by the Review Team
Review Team meeting to agree findings and judgements	X	X

## 6.4 QAA Officer

A QAA Officer appointed by QAA will coordinate and manage the review process, support the provider, and give advice to the Review Team. The QAA Officer can support and advise the student representative body about how best to work with the team, what areas the provider is focusing on and how to effectively engage with the review process. The QAA Officer will be present throughout the review but does not influence the deliberations, conclusions or findings of the Review Team. This role ensures that the overarching review process is conducted according to the published method and that the conclusions of the review are robust and evidence-based.

The QAA Officer facilitates communication between the Review Team, the LSR, the Facilitator and provider, manages logistics, chairs Review Team meetings, edits the review reports, and liaises with the provider regarding any follow-up activities.

## 6.5 The Review Team

The Review Team is the team that undertakes the analysis of evidence provided and leads meetings with students, staff and stakeholders. The Review Team usually consists of three to five individuals who are academics, senior higher education administrators and students, who fulfil the set criteria to become a QAA Reviewer. Each Review Team includes a student reviewer who is a full and equal member of the Review Team. All reviewers are fully trained in the relevant review method.

## Annex 1: Glossary of terms

This glossary provides short definitions of terms used in this guide. The definitions are not exhaustive and this glossary should be used in conjunction with the relevant Review Handbook.

Term	Definition
academic integrity	Academic integrity is a code of practice generally adopted and accepted by higher education providers and stakeholders. It is largely understood to encompass a range of values relating to honesty and rigour in academic activities - see <a href="#">this video</a> that explains what it is, the consequences of academic misconduct, and support available to students.
academic quality	Academic quality is a comprehensive term referring to how, and how well, higher education providers manage teaching and learning opportunities, and the support they provide, to help students progress, succeed and optimise their achievement.
academic standards	The standards set by degree-awarding bodies for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. Providers are responsible for defining their own academic standards by setting the pass marks and determining the grading/marking schemes and any criteria for classification of qualifications that differentiate between levels of student achievement above and below the threshold academic standards. See also 'threshold academic standard'.
affirmation	An affirmation is recognition of an action arising from the effective use of a provider's own quality procedures that is already taking place in a provider to improve a recognised weakness or inadequacy related to the judgement areas.
areas of focus	Areas of focus are selected by a provider to demonstrate their approach to the management and enhancement of its provision. An area of focus has a strategic focus for the provider and may fall into one of a number of categories. It may be an area of challenge that the provider is seeking to address, be an area where particular strategic emphasis is being placed, reflect investment in a change initiative, or be an example of exemplary practice. In QER, three or four areas of focus may be put forward by the provider.
commendation	Review teams may commend practice that they identify as a process or way of working that makes a particularly positive contribution to the student learning experience within the context of the provider.
condition	A condition is attached to an unsatisfactory judgement to identify the more substantial matter or matters of concern that form the focus for follow-up action that will be required to complete the review. Conditions will reflect recommendations that are considered to require urgent and serious action.

Term (cont)	Definition
credit	A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study and expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level. The number of credits at a specified credit level indicates the amount and difficulty of the learning achieved, based on notional hours of learning. See also <a href="#">What is Credit? A guide for students</a> .
enhancement	The process by which providers take deliberate steps to improve the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students.
evidence-based	The conclusions of the provider (in its self-assessment) or the Review Team are based on evidence. This includes quantitative and qualitative data, meeting records and papers including materials which have been submitted to the Review Team as part of the review process. Findings from meetings held during the review visit also contribute to the evidence base.
external examiner	An independent expert appointed by a provider to comment on student achievement in relation to established academic standards and to look at approaches to assessment.
governing body	The governing body is the group that has overall responsibility for the educational character and mission of the institution. The governing body may be called the Council. It is made up of internal and external members. Internal members include the head of the provider and student and staff representatives. External members are appointed to the governing body with experience which is valuable to the provider. The provider is accountable to the governing body.
Higher National Certificate and Higher National Diploma	A Higher National Certificate (HNC) is a qualification set at Level 4 of the FHEQ. A Higher National Diploma (HND) is a qualification set at Level 5 of the FHEQ. These qualifications are awarded by Pearson Education Ltd or a degree-awarding body under licence from Pearson.
quality assurance	The systematic monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching, and the processes that support them, to ensure that the standards of academic awards meet the Expectations set out in the Quality Code, and that the quality of the student learning experience is being safeguarded and improved.
recommendation	Review Teams make recommendations where they agree that a provider should consider changing a practice, policy or a process in order to safeguard academic standards and to assure the quality of learning opportunities.
regulated providers	A regulated provider is a higher education provider that is subject to HEFCW's regulatory powers. The <a href="#">HEFCW website</a> has more information and a list of regulated providers.
student representative body	A body that represents the collective views of the students within a provider. Many providers have a formal students' union (SU) or students' association (SA). These structures usually have officers

	elected by the student body with an overarching lead representative - a student president, for example.
threshold academic standards	Threshold academic standards are the minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student must demonstrate to be eligible for an academic award. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national qualifications frameworks, qualifications characteristic statements, and Subject Benchmark Statements.
transnational education (TNE)	Transnational education (TNE) is higher education learning opportunities that are provided outside the UK but lead to an award of a UK degree-awarding body.

## Annex 2: Questions to aid in the preparation of the student submission

These questions are provided as prompts to help students in their development of the student submission. They do not all have to be answered and do not form a template. All of the answers should be evidence-based and represent the views of the wider student body.

These questions may also be useful in discussions with students as to the 'type' of questions that may be asked in the Review Team meetings with students.

- Is the provider fair, explicit and consistent in how it recruits and admits students?
- Does the provider seek to identify individual student needs? How well are individual needs supported by the provider?
- Is the publicly-available information about the provider accurate and up-to-date?
- Are students given appropriate information about what they need to learn and achieve to be successful?
- Are the courses well-designed and sufficiently challenging?
- Are teaching and learning methods varied to accommodate students with different learning styles?
- Are there opportunities for work-based learning? Is appropriate advice and guidance available for students involved in work-based learning?
- Are students involved in checking courses are relevant and up-to-date, such as through module or course evaluation/surveys, participation in approval panels?
- Are students assessed fairly, consistently and in ways that test what has been learnt and are consistent with programme documentation relating to course outcomes?
- Are students provided with assessment feedback that is timely, helpful and constructive? Does it identify how students can improve?
- Are students given guidance on academic integrity and how to avoid academic misconduct?
- Are external examiner reports made available for student representatives to read and comment on? Are these comments acted upon by the course team or more widely by the provider? Are you told what actions they are taking?
- Does the provider enable students to be independent learners, and analytical, critical and creative thinkers? Are students helped to develop personally and professionally?
- Are complaints about the student experience and appeals against academic decisions dealt with in a fair and timely way?
- Does the provider create an environment for research students where they can learn how to do research and achieve academic, personal and professional outcomes?
- What student representative structures are in place? What backing do students receive from the provider to support these structures?
- How visible and accessible is the student representative structure to the student body?
- To what extent does the provider's strategies and approaches encourage a partnership approach to student engagement?
- Do students engaged within the student representative structures reflect the diversity of the student population? Are there any groups of students that are not engaging or more difficult to engage with?

- How are students engaged in quality assurance and enhancement activities? Where are students represented on decision-making committees?
- Are students informed of actions or changes made in response to student feedback?
- Does the provider recognise the contribution of students to quality assurance and enhancement processes? If so, how?
- Are teaching, learning and assessment opportunities in the medium of Welsh available to students and readily accessible?

## Annex 3: Checklist of key LSR review activities

This section is intended to provide an overview of the key activities with which the LSR is involved during the review and in preparation for the onsite visit(s). It is printable and can be used as a log to record what has happened so far and what activities remain. It may be helpful to insert key dates when they are known, such as the dates for the onsite visit(s). The LSR and Facilitator should work together during the review to support the process and the Review Team.

Initial contact between QAA and the provider	Done(✓)
Student representative body to identify a Lead Student Representative (LSR)	
LSR meets with the Facilitator to discuss how students and student representatives will be able to contribute to the provider self-assessment	
LSR should consider the value of running an event which informs the student body and student representatives of the review process and ways in which students are able to contribute	
LSR discusses how students can contribute and support the review process with the Facilitator; this could be through focus groups, discussions, participation in planning/working groups or other activities	
The student body and student representatives should review and evaluate the work which has been completed by the provider since the last review (as appropriate); this will enable the development of a collective student view on progress, change and further development needs - this can be captured in the student submission	
The student body and student representatives should compile and review any notes or minutes on their engagement in quality assurance and enhancement processes	
LSR should consider what types of existing qualitative and quantitative information capturing student views may be available from the provider; the LSR can seek guidance from QAA Cymru if needed	
LSR should start considering the scope and design of the student submission	
LSR should highlight any areas of student engagement which the student body and student representatives would like the review to focus on	
LSR and Facilitator attend the provider meeting(s) with the QAA Officer: <b>Date of the provider meeting:</b> .....(insert date when known)	
LSR discusses with the Facilitator any support that may be needed, such as administrative support or help with arranging briefing events	
If it is likely that the LSR will no longer be a student at the provider when the onsite visit(s) takes place - arrange for a successor and book a date for a handover meeting	
Early preparation and submission	Done(✓)
LSR completes the student submission and shares this with the student representative body and the Facilitator	



LSR uploads the student submission	
<b>Deadline for submission:</b> .....(insert date when known)	
<b>Preparing for the onsite visit(s)</b>	<b>Done(✓)</b>
LSR considers the draft schedule for the Review Visit and identifies students to meet with the Review Team - it may be helpful to use a matrix approach to include a diverse group of students	
LSR provides any further student-owned documents that the Review Team has requested via the QAA Officer	
LSR should consider running an event for student representatives before the onsite visit(s) where they may ask questions and clarifications on the process, the provider self-assessment and/or the student submission	
LSR should provide student representatives with any documents which have been submitted so they may prepare for meeting with the Review Team	
LSR should review their personal timetable and get ahead of assessment deadlines, etc	
<b>Onsite visit(s)</b>	<b>Done(✓)</b>
<b>Scheduled onsite visit dates:</b> .....(insert dates when known)	
LSR and Facilitator establish an equal working relationship with the Review Team	
LSR reviews the (updated) schedule for the Review Visit with the Facilitator	
LSR informs the Facilitator of students to meet with the Review Team - to pass on to the QAA Officer	
LSR should be available for the regular meetings with the QAA Officer and Review Team as needed. LSR should aim to ensure work with the Facilitator and Review Team are scheduled around any academic commitments, such as lectures and seminars.	
LSR and the Facilitator work with the Review Team to provide any additional evidence needed to clarify matters	
LSR and the Facilitator attend the final meeting of the Review Team where non-binding feedback is shared (depending on the review method)	
<b>Reporting the outcomes</b>	<b>Done(✓)</b>
LSR should be available to comment on the draft reports correcting any factual errors <b>Deadline for comments on draft report to be sent to Facilitator:</b> .....(insert date when known)	
When the reports are published the LSR should ensure that the report is shared with the student body and student representatives, and ensure that they are aware of areas which the provider may prioritise	
LSR and the student representative body work with the provider to develop the action plan (as appropriate)	

## Annex 4: Guidance on alternative student submissions in QAA reviews

This guidance is intended to provide assistance to students who wish to provide non-written submissions for QAA Cymru reviews, in order to ensure that they provide evidence that a Review Team can use. This should be used in conjunction with the relevant Review Handbook.

### General comments

Creating a non-written submission can be a great way of reflecting the particular experience at your provider and might help involve more students in the process. Remember: this is the key opportunity for students' views to contribute to the review - it is important that it is effective in providing the Review Team with information it can use.

You may find it useful to also make use of a written supporting document, to provide background information that may otherwise be hard to convey, such as evidence sources and details on the student body.

### Privacy

Remember: it is important to respect participants' privacy in all types of submission. If you plan on sharing the submission with the wider student body, always ensure you check with those involved that they are happy for their video clip or sound bite to be published, as it is possible that your provider may be able to identify them. If students wish to remain anonymous while providing evidence, steps can be taken to avoid identifying them (either through careful filming, podcasts or making use of written supporting documents).

### Video submissions<sup>1</sup>

Video submissions can be an excellent way of showing Review Teams in a very immediate way what students think about their provider. They can also be confusing and hard to follow if they are not clearly recorded - a video submission should have audible vocals, a clear structure and content that is relevant to the review. They should also have some form of introduction setting out relevant background information that enables the Review Team to understand what they are about to see. This would also be a good opportunity to include information about who has been involved in the submission, which students it does not cover, and where the evidence has come from.

The Review Team will **not** find a video tour of your campus useful, nor the filming of a single focus group without any conclusions. If you do film focus groups or interviews with students as part of your submission, then make sure you explain how they have been put together, who was involved, and the conclusions across all the focus groups and interviews.

Perhaps consider backing these up with evidence and using clips to emphasise points.

For example, if you want to show that students are happy that their feedback is acted upon, find some statistics that show this (such as from the National Student Survey), and use clips of students to back it up. Remember: you can use some written evidence to help with this.

If your provider has students involved in film or media production, they may want to get involved in producing the student submission. Remember, however, that you and your

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<sup>1</sup> The QAA secure electronic site which hosts review documents limits the size of some audio and video files. This might mean an audio/video submission needs to be separated into smaller files before it is submitted. Guidance on audio/video files sizes and formats will be shared at the initial provider meeting.

provider are not being judged on your film production skills! The most important thing is to ensure that the Review Team gains a good understanding of the issues being raised and that clear evidence is presented.

In terms of format, video files and supporting documents can be provided in the same folder when uploading to the secure electronic site. It is strongly recommended that the video is in a format compatible with Windows Media Player to keep things consistent for the Review Team: **.wmv**, **.avi**, **.wmd** or **.wav**. The maximum file size is 80MB.

### **Podcast submissions**

Podcast or soundbite student submissions should follow similar principles to video submissions. Podcasts can be particularly useful for capturing the views of students who do not want to be on camera. Care should be taken, however, to ensure that recordings are audible and that it is clear to the audience what they are listening to.

The Review Team will **not** find interviews with individual students useful if they do not have any conclusions. As with video submissions, it is recommended that recordings of students talking should be backed up with evidence. For example, if you want to show that students are concerned about access to the library, find some statistics to back this up and present them alongside recordings of students. Remember: you can use written evidence to help with this.

To keep things consistent for the Review Team, the following formats are acceptable for podcast or soundbite submissions: **.wmv**, **.avi**, **.mp3** or **.wav**.

### **Presentations**

Artwork or other presentations can provide a visual representation of students' views. You may wish to involve art or design students. You could present an infographic cover of the written report, including a visual representation of key statistics or comments.

Remember, however, that your student submission should meet the key criteria in the general comments above.

These submissions should be sent as a **.pdf** file.

### **Uploading**

All submissions should be uploaded to the QAA secure electronic site. The Facilitator will coordinate the upload. You may wish to send us hard copies - for example, CDs. Please clearly label these and provide adequate copies for each member of the Review Team.

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