# QAA

# University of Wales, Bangor

APRIL 2007

## Institutional review

# Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) exists to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education (HE) qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE.

To do this QAA carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In Wales this process is known as institutional review. QAA operates similar but separate processes in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

## The purpose of institutional review

The aims of institutional review are to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges are:
- providing HE, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard
- exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

## Judgements

Institutional review results in judgements about the institutions being reviewed. Judgements are made about:
- the **confidence** that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards
- the **reliance** that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

These judgements are expressed as either **confidence, limited confidence or no confidence** and are accompanied by examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

## Nationally agreed standards

Institutional review uses a set of nationally agreed reference points, known as the 'Academic Infrastructure', to consider an institution's standards and quality. These are published by QAA and consist of:
- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), which include descriptions of different HE qualifications
- The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. They outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

## The review process

Institutional reviews are carried out by teams of academics who review the way in which institutions oversee their academic quality and standards. Because they are evaluating their equals, the process is called 'peer review'.

The main elements of institutional review are:
- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution nine months before the review visit
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the review visit
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the review visit
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the review team five weeks before the review visit
- the review visit, which lasts five days
- the publication of a report on the review team's judgements and findings 22 weeks after the review visit.

**The evidence for the review**

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

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

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

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

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# Summary

## Introduction

A review team visited the University of Wales, Bangor (UWB) during the 2005-06 academic year to conduct an institutional review. The team comprised Professor E Evans, Professor P Hodson, Ms L Smith (reviewers), and Mr RA Platt (review secretary). The review was coordinated for the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education by Mrs S Patterson, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. The purpose of institutional review is to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the institution offers. Institutional review leads to a judgement of confidence in the management of the quality and standards of the awards being offered by the institution.

The words 'academic standards' are used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK.

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

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

To arrive at its conclusions the team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and to student representatives. It also read a wide range of documents relating to the way the University manages the academic aspects of its provision. This report provides a summary of the findings of the review team.

## Outcome of the review

As a result of its enquiries, the review team's view is that:

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

## Features of good practice

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

- the close working relationship and effective liaison between the Teaching and Learning Group and the Quality Assurance Group, which provides for effective and coordinated oversight of the operation and development of UWB's provision

- the use of Task Groups and Task and End Groups to provide focused and expeditious discussion of UWB business

- the policy governing the closure of programmes of study which includes appropriate consultation with both staff and students and which protects the interests of students

- the system of peer guides for students at their induction which is indicative of UWB's careful approach to support for students and which lasts throughout their time at the institution

- the integration of academic planning with transparent resource distribution, both of which clearly support the implementation of the institution's Strategic Plan

- the full and demonstrable commitment to the Welsh language and Welsh culture with the Welsh Medium Task Group/Grwp Tasg Cyfrwng-Cymraeg, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Welsh Medium), providing effective and energetic leadership in this area.

## Recommendations for action

The review team advises UWB to:

- take steps to ensure that the institution's committee papers and minutes are circulated in a timely manner to support informed and considered discussion in UWB's deliberative fora.

The team considers it desirable for UWB to:

- review the approach to viva voce examinations in assessment to establish and secure consistency in the criteria for the use of such examinations

- monitor the operation of the Task Groups to confirm that the system of appointment on grounds of particular expertise does not limit the participation of students and staff in the deliberative processes of the institution

- make the recording of planned actions, including identification of responsibilities and deadlines, explicit in the minutes of meetings.

## External reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings the review team also investigated the use made by UWB of the Academic Infrastructure that QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the review suggest that the institution has engaged effectively with all elements of the Academic Infrastructure.

The institutional review also considered the reliability of the information set published by institutions in the format recommended in The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales' (HEFCW) document W0405HE. The findings of the review suggest that the institution is alert to the requirements set out in HEFCW W0405HE, and is moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities in this respect.

# Main report

# Main report

## Introduction: the University of Wales, Bangor

### The institution and its mission

1    The University of Wales, Bangor (UWB) was founded in 1884 as the University College of North Wales as a result of a campaign in the late nineteenth century for higher education provision in Wales. Funds were raised by public subscription to establish a college of university rank in Bangor; an important feature of UWB's foundation was the voluntary contributions made by local quarrymen from their weekly wages. It is a founder member of the University of Wales, itself established in 1893, which is the formal awarding body for the degrees offered at UWB. Prior to the establishment of the University of Wales students received external degrees of the University of London. In 1997 a revision to the Charter gave legal recognition to the name 'University of Wales, Bangor'. It is an independent corporate institution which has charitable status. Following the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) institutional review of the University of Wales in 2004, full responsibility for quality and standards was devolved to the constituent institutions of the federal University; at that time UWB was already largely an autonomous institution in respect of teaching, learning and research.

2    UWB operates in the Welsh political context within the funding regime of the Higher Education Funding for Council for Wales (HEFCW) which is sponsored by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). The WAG long-term strategy for higher education, entitled 'Reaching Higher', sets out specific targets for the higher education sector in Wales against which higher education institutions are measured annually. UWB is a bilingual institution with a firm commitment to Welsh-medium higher education.

3    UWB's Strategic Plan 2005-10 (Sustainability through Excellence) defined a new mission for the institution: 'to be a world-class research-led university, to provide teaching and learning of the highest quality, and to contribute to the development of the economy, health and culture of a sustainable Wales and a sustainable world'. Implementation of the Strategic Plan involved further changes to administrative and managerial structures which were already in the process of radical reorganisation (see paragraphs 7,10,11,13). Both the changes to structures and consequent revisions to policies and procedures influenced the conduct of the scrutiny.

### Academic structures and administration

4    The Charter and associated Statutes provide a broad framework for the legal structures and define the responsibilities of the institution's senior committees in relation to governance and academic management. The Court, chaired by the President of the institution, is a large body which includes representation from the wider community of North Wales. The Court provides a public forum where members can raise any matters of interest and concern about the operation of the institution. It generally meets once a year to consider the Annual Report and Accounts, approve any proposed amendments to the Charter and elect the principal lay officers of the University.

5    The Council is the governing body and, as such, is ultimately responsible for finance, property and investments and also for setting the overall strategic direction of the institution. The Council meets four times a year. Changes in train during the period of the review aimed to reduce the membership of the Council over time to about 30 members. A Resources Committee, Strategy Committee and Audit and Risk Committee report to the Council. There is also a Risk Management Task Group that focuses on addressing the external demands and obligations placed on the institution.

6    The Senate, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, is the academic authority of the institution. It deals with academic policy, regulations and the academic progress of students; it has 106 members and meets three times a year The Senate receives regular progress reports and briefings on policy and procedural developments from members of the Executive. The Board of Academic Heads, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, comprises the heads of academic resource centres, the Executive, the Academic Registrar and two student members. The Board is scheduled to meet monthly and reports to, and is consulted by, the Executive on a range of academic policy and strategic matters.

7    In January 2004 a Working Group, comprising the Vice-Chancellor, the Registrar and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Resources), was convened to review the institution's management and decision-making structures. Prior to the review the institution had 120 committees resulting in what it judged to be 'slowness and ineffectiveness in decision-making'. The working group was mindful of the need to preserve collegiality and participative decision-making. The working group recommended changes in the constituencies and the size of Council membership and a rationalisation of its subcommittee structure.

8    The appointment of the current Vice-Chancellor in August 2004 initiated further changes designed to secure more effective management and decision-making. Revised decision-making processes and streamlined committee structures were approved by the Council in October 2004. An Executive group was created to provide a focused senior management team. The Executive comprises the Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the four Pro-Vice-Chancellors, the Registrar, the Director of Finance and the Director of Planning. The Pro-Vice-Chancellors have responsibility for: Teaching and Learning; Research; Welsh Medium and Widening Participation, and Knowledge Transfer and Enterprise.

9    The terms of reference of the Executive indicate the range of its leadership responsibilities. These include academic planning (responsibility for the size, academic shape and structure of the University) and financial management, including the allocation of resources. The requirement that all proposals for new programmes be referred to this body is therefore appropriate. Planning and resource distribution are formulated within the context of the Strategic Plan. The Executive takes the lead in determining the strategic direction of the institution and works effectively with task groups (see paragraph 11) to initiate and develop policy. In meetings with the review team staff from all levels of the institution demonstrated a clear understanding of the revised structures, considering that these new arrangements were evolving into a more effective and efficient operation. On the evidence available to them, the team supports this view, considering it a feature of good practice that academic planning is integrated with a model of resource distribution which is transparent and fully debated in the appropriate fora. The team concluded that the Executive was effective overall in providing strong managerial leadership, with informed decision-making which drew on consultation with individuals and formal committees as appropriate.

10    UWB has been active in remodelling its deliberative structures. A 'plethora of committees' has been replaced by a number of task groups, each with a key, specific managerial focus. All but two of the task groups are chaired by members of the Executive and the Chairs have authority to take management decisions on matters discussed in the task groups. All task groups report to the Executive. There are also 'task and end' groups which oversee short-term projects. Task and task and end groups are strongly supported by an efficient administrative team.

11    The task and task and end groups are constituted by reference to specific skills and expertise rather than through election on a representative basis. The review team had some

reservations about the level of student representation afforded by a system based on appointment on grounds of particular expertise, but students whom the team met were enthusiastic in support of the task group structure, which they said was responsive to matters raised by the student body and which they considered resulted in effective and timely action. The team considers the operation of these groups to be a feature of good practice, involving effective liaison with the Executive, and the provision of an effective mechanism for informed debate and expeditious despatch of the institution's business. Nevertheless, the team considers it desirable that UWB monitor the operation of its task groups to ensure that the system of appointment on grounds of specific expertise does not limit wider participation by both staff and students in the deliberative processes of the institution.

12    UWB asserts its full commitment to the Welsh dimension and obligations in its plans for 'Third Mission Excellence', articulated in the Strategic Plan. The institution pursues its obligations under the Welsh Language Board and its Welsh Medium delivery within remits under HEFCW and WAG. The importance of Welsh Medium initiatives to both teaching and research was evidenced both in the comprehensive reports made to the Executive by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Welsh Medium) and by the active engagement of the Executive in supporting new initiatives. The review team considered that the institution's full and demonstrable commitment to Welsh language and culture was effectively supported by the Welsh Medium Task Group under the energetic leadership of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor. This appeared to the team to be a feature of good practice in the institution, linking as it did wider strategic priorities with effective operational practice.

13    During the period of the review, the academic structure of the institution was being revised to move from nine academic schools/departments grouped within four faculties, to one structure based on six academic colleges, with units below college

level in the new structure being termed 'schools'. The change was introduced in order to provide improved academic coherence and more effective budgetary controls at the level of the discipline, in relation to overall strategic priorities. It was also intended that consolidation of administrative structures at the level of the college rather than in individual schools would provide more effective communication and liaison both between colleges and with the central administration, while also being more cost-effective. Shadow college boards were established to take forward the implementation of the colleges and were charged with devising local management, committee and administrative structures in line with central guidance.

14    UWB was firm in stating that policies and procedures for the assurance of academic standards and quality would be unaffected by these changes. The review team was provided with documentation that set out the responsibilities for the assurance of quality and standards under the previous regime and how these would be fulfilled within the new structures. From discussion with staff and review of relevant documentation, the team came to the view that UWB's perception that the new structure did not fundamentally change academic responsibilities but rather offered opportunities for enhancement to the effectiveness of an already robust system, was well founded. In particular, the team noted the support for the changes from staff and students, following an extensive and effective process of consultation.

15    Historically, UWB has considered that its relatively small size and collegial traditions ensured that effective, if informal, chains of contact were in place. The Executive wished to emphasize the continued importance of effective channels of communication within the new structure, and therefore placed the minutes of the institution's key decision-making bodies on a 'Management and Governance' area on the intranet. In meetings with staff and students, the review team was able to confirm that this form of communication was valued

and that it played a role in ensuring that all members of the institution would be able readily to track the progress of important policy issues. Nonetheless the review team had some concerns about aspects of the implementation of this initiative, given the institution's own recognition of, and clear commitment to, effective communication. The team found that action planning was often implicit without specific timetables being set. There was also evidence that, in some cases, version control of papers going through a process of consultation and refinement was not always tight. Committee papers were not always despatched in a timely manner; some important papers were tabled rather than pre-circulated. Circulation of minutes, particularly in electronic form, was sometimes unduly delayed. UWB recognises that preparation of bilingual versions of minutes can contribute to the delay. Partly because of the need for effective support of all the institution's deliberative functions and partly because delays in minute circulation have the potential to compromise its commitment to prompt and effective communication, the team advises UWB to take steps to ensure that committee papers and minutes are circulated in a timely manner to support informed and considered discussion in UWB's deliberative fora. It is also desirable that UWB make the recording of planned actions, including identification of responsibilities and deadlines, explicit in the minutes of meetings.

## The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

## The institution's framework for managing quality and standards

16    UWB summarises its quality assurance principles as being based on partnership, continuous improvement, audit and responsiveness to change. A comprehensive Quality Assurance Manual (the Manual) provides a regulatory framework for higher education provision at both the undergraduate and the postgraduate levels. The Manual comprises twelve sections which cover inter alia: quality assurance principles and responsibilities; recruitment and admissions; validation, periodic review and revalidation; the role and responsibilities of external examiners; principles governing assessment (including those covering unfair practice); research programmes; guidance on collaborative provision; placement learning; provision for disabled students; careers information and guidance; student complaints and appeals.

17    The institution's Teaching and Learning Task Group's Terms of Reference require it 'to promote high-quality teaching and learning' and to 'advise and oversee the implementation of the University's teaching and learning strategy' while the Quality Assurance Group's remit is 'to ensure that routine quality assurance procedures run effectively'. The work of the Teaching and Learning Task Group indicated a considerable degree of evaluation and reflection, demonstrated through debate on a number of issues relating to quality management, including comparability between schools.

18    The Strategic Plan states that teaching and learning excellence requires the development of a portfolio of appropriately challenging degree programmes. Mechanisms for defining and securing academic standards operate within the Welsh Higher Education Credit Consortium, and the institution has developed a student transcript that includes European Credit Transfer System credits. Undergraduate degrees operate on a modular structure, based on the achievement of 120 credits in each academic year. The levels of credit, defined as a threshold standard of academic achievement, are articulated in the Manual. The review team noted some variations of practice in respect of modules designed to cover levels HE2 and 3 of the undergraduate programme; these were identified through Internal Quality Audit (IQA) (see paragraph 24) and, as appropriate, recommendations for remedial action were made by the internal audit team and reported to the Quality Assurance Group for action.

19    The institution offers opportunities in all schools for research leading to the degrees of MPhil and PhD, as well as a large number of research training master's programmes. It also offers a Graduate Programme designed to 'equip research students with the broad portfolio of skills required for the successful pursuit of research and increasingly demanded by employers'. The Manual sets out the regulations and requirements from admissions and registration through to final examination and award of degrees. The recent special review of research degree programmes by QAA found that 'the institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programme provision was appropriate and satisfactory'. The review team considers that the regulatory framework is appropriate for the granting of higher degrees and is in alignment with the section of the *Code of practice, for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* on postgraduate research students, published by QAA.

20    The review team concluded that UWB implemented and monitored its processes in respect of quality and standards with care. They saw ample evidence that the work of the Teaching and Learning Task Group and the Quality Assurance Task Group together enabled the institution to be confident both that limitations were identified and that effective mechanisms existed to address such limitations. Indeed, the efficiency and assiduity of these committees had brought to light more variability of practice than would have emerged through more routine scrutiny procedures. The team was also impressed by the level of engagement displayed by the student representatives on the relevant quality committees. Through meetings with staff and review of documentation, the team was able to confirm the institution's own view that its framework for managing quality and standards was robust, flexible and fit for purpose.

## Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

21    UWB has developed an internal Code of Practice for Programme approval, monitoring and review. Proposals for new courses are submitted to the Executive, which considers the resource and strategic implications. If approval to proceed is given by the Executive, the detailed design of programmes is undertaken by the academic schools and is considered initially by that school's board of studies. Scrutiny by the board of studies confirms that programmes accord with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and relevant subject benchmarks. Employers, current and former students and professional bodies have an input to the design of new programmes. The participating school or schools must also demonstrate that the human and material resources are in place to sustain the programme. Schools are encouraged to conduct a local validation, with involvement from a member of the Teaching and Learning Task Group, prior to the formal institutional event to ensure appropriately detailed scrutiny of the proposal.

22    The institutional validation panels for new programmes include a subject specialist from a school other than the presenting school, a professional representative of the professional or statutory body where appropriate, an employer representative, and external representation from the University of Wales. Both school-level and institutional validation panels must obtain the views of at least one other assessor external both to the institution and to the University of Wales. Review of documentation and discussion with members of validation panels led the review team to conclude that the validation process was conducted professionally in line with UWB's stated requirements. The team also confirmed that validation processes were in alignment with the relevant precepts of QAA's *Code of practice*.

23    UWB's standard monitoring and review processes comprise two elements: annual internal review and internal quality audit. Each academic school is required to conduct an

annual internal review of its academic programmes which considers the performance of the individual modules in the programme. Annual review also considers student feedback, the comments of external examiners and observations on how the school's overall development plans have been monitored and developed. The results of reviews are recorded on QA1 forms returned to the Academic Registry and are then considered in detail by the Quality Assurance Task Group. There was clear evidence that consideration of the QA1 forms in the Task Group was robust and scrupulous with careful attention to identification of matters requiring remedial action as well as to points of good practice.

24    Internal quality audits (IQA) of each school, conducted on a five-year rotational basis, are considered by UWB to be central to its approach to safeguarding quality and academic standards. The IQAs are intended to confirm that relevant processes and mechanisms for assuring quality and standards are both in place and operating as intended at the local level. The school under review produces a self-evaluation document and the IQA is conducted by a panel that includes external representation. Topics necessarily covered during the review include evaluation of all undergraduate and taught postgraduate modules, feedback systems, the extent to which schools are complying with relevant internal codes of practice and the effectiveness of staff development and training. The institution has concluded from the IQAs to date, that in general, school curricula are up to date, holistic, comprehensive in their coverage and that compliance with internal codes of practice 'is not a current concern'. The overview of IQA outcomes also found that a 'clear and explicit link between departmental strategic thinking on teaching and learning and University strategy' was not always apparent, that too many modules were offered and that there was not 'sufficient strategic thinking on developing teaching and learning' beyond the requirements of the audit process. These matters were brought to the attention of the

Quality Assurance Task Group and followed up through the normal internal quality assurance processes.

25    Notwithstanding the institution's own conclusion that 'compliance with internal codes of practice' was not a current concern, it was clear to the review team, from the review of documentation, that securing uniform implementation of the relevant internal codes of practice had involved considerable effort and ongoing vigilance. Discussions with staff revealed that, in many schools, detailed knowledge of new, or extensively revised, procedures was patchy. The Chair of the Quality Assurance Task Group has also expressed concern that the Forum for Academic Administrators has not been meeting regularly, thus jeopardising the process of effective dissemination and embedding of what have been radically changed practices in recent years. It was also clear to the team that the Quality Assurance Task Group had concerns about variability in a number of areas. These include responses to external examiners' reports; the level of detail and overall value of QA1 forms recording the outcomes of annual monitoring; issues of comparability of demand for students on some cross-school courses; the input of particular external assessors to the review process; the lack of appropriate criterion referencing for marking in some schools; and the robustness of checking for, and dealing with, issues of plagiarism.

26    Through discussion with staff and its review of documentation, particularly that from the Quality Assurance Task Group, the review team concluded that the institution's processes allowed problems such as those identified above to be addressed in a timely and effective way. The team considered as examples of good practice first that, in the light of experience, the Chair of the Task Group had produced a paper on Learning Outcomes for approval by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) for publication on the intranet to meet a perceived need revealed by the IQA process. Secondly, that the institution has produced a self-critical and reflexive paper summarising the lessons

which had been learned from IQAs over a two-year period. While the team were not convinced that overall observation of institutional requirements was already sufficiently robust to enable predominant attention now to be focused on enhancement, which is the stated aim as the system moves to maturity, they did believe that the new structures gave grounds for optimism that the most important issues relating to inappropriate variability and inconsistency were being addressed as a matter of urgency within the new Task Group structure and also, when necessary, by the Executive.

27     The review team read a range of documentation including the resultant reports relevant to the IQA process. The review team concluded that the system was thorough and that mechanisms existed to ensure that perceived weaknesses were identified and addressed. The team also came to the view that the administrative and executive support given to the important task of IQA was exemplary. The Chair and Secretary are constant across all of these audits and their role is pivotal both in identifying variable and improvable practice at school level and in ensuring that the various audit teams cover the ground fully and in appropriate range and depth. The team also considered it good practice that the administrative and service departments were subject to the same process of internal audit as that employed for academic schools. The team concluded that processes for monitoring and review were fit for purpose and operating as intended and were also consonant with the relevant precepts of QAA's *Code of practice.*

## Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

28     A number of UWB's undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are accredited in whole or in part by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs). The requirements of the PSRBs are considered at validation when a representative of the PSRB may be included on the panel. Reports from PSRBs are handled in a similar way to those of external examiners,

being received by the Academic Registry, which makes comments for detailed consideration by the Quality Assurance Task Group. Where relevant, PSRBs are also expected to have an input into relevant new programme proposals.

## Closure of programmes

29     The review team found that UWB had a clear policy and associated procedures for proposals to discontinue taught degree programmes. The institution undertakes to involve the Students' Union and to consult it at the earliest opportunity, to inform students currently enrolled and ensure that, wherever practicable, the programme will continue to be taught until the cohort of students has completed the programme. UWB also undertakes to explore the possibility of students transferring to another institution. The team were able to examine documentation which led to the decision, taken by the Council in September 2005, to endorse the Executive's recommendation that recruitment to the single and joint honours programmes in Mathematics should cease. They noted that the decision was taken after almost two years of discussion at the Planning Development and Implementation Group and in the Executive, during which alternative restructuring plans were considered. The team was able to confirm that the institution's policy was implemented according to the stated requirements and that the interests of students were safeguarded during the period that the future of Mathematics was under discussion. The team concluded that the procedures for the closure of programmes were secure and were designed to ensure that, during an inevitably difficult and controversial process, the interests of students were protected, enabling them to complete their programmes of study. UWB's approach in this area is identified as a feature of good practice in the review.

## Student representation at local and institutional level

30     The institution stated that students are represented on all major decision-making

bodies and also on all departmental/school committees. In meetings with student representatives, the review team heard that matters of concern raised by students were listened to and addressed. Student representatives were, in general, well-informed about the academic direction and policies of the institution. A Student Forum, recently established at the time of the review and on which all five sabbatical officers sat, appeared to be working well and seemed to be developing as a significant vehicle for communication.

31     The Institutional Review Task Group and the Students' Union identified variability in the effectiveness of student representation in some areas; in response a Student Representation Task and End Group was established to consider how representation might best operate to enhance the student experience. One development arising from the work of the Task and End Group has been the establishment of a website to provide comprehensive information about services and sources of information. The Group also focused on the development of training to assist student representatives in their role.

32     In meetings with members of the Student Representation Task and End Group, the review team learned that considerable thought had been given to identifying the full range of student needs. These included: the need to embed Welsh speakers within an effective system of overall representation and support; the articulation of a clear distinction between academic issues, on which school student representatives were expected to act as advocates of student interest, and pastoral issues in which the role of student representatives was to help students to locating relevant central provision of expert advice and guidance. The team considered that the use of the Task and End Group to respond to the need to improve student representation was evidence that the institution valued, and was responsive, to the views of its students.

## Assurance of the quality of teaching delivered collaboratively or through distributed and distance-learning methods

33     The institution's 'Notes for Guidance for Franchised Provision' set out the requirements for approval of collaborative arrangements. The review team found that the Notes provided clear guidance on procedures to be followed. Each validation process for franchised provision includes a prevalidation visit by relevant senior managers from UWB to appraise the adequacy of resources, staffing, and academic support services in the proposed partner institution. New proposals for franchised provision require the signing of an institutional level memorandum of agreement by both institutions before being submitted for formal approval. Terms and conditions for the operation of established partnerships are reviewed triennially.

34     UWB includes some non-standard provision - defined as courses other than the standard undergraduate and postgraduate programmes - in its portfolio. It has taken the lead in establishing the 'Community University of North Wales' to promote Higher Education/Further Education collaboration. All non-standard provision is validated on a similar basis to that governing degree-level programmes. In meetings with senior staff, the review team learned that the institution believed 'old-style' franchised provision to be outmoded but that the Executive was actively considering the value of alternative initiatives both to meet the widening participation agenda and also to aid economic regeneration in North West Wales.

## The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

### External examiners and their reports

35     UWB identifies the external examiner system as playing 'a significant part in assuring both quality and standards'. The role and duties of external examiners are published in the

institution's Code of Practice for External Examiners and rigorous academic criteria for nomination for the post of external examiner are listed in the Quality Assurance Manual. External examiner nominations are considered and approved by the Teaching and Learning Task Group. It is the responsibility of heads of school to ensure that external examiners be informed of the intended learning outcomes of a programme. A recent development at the time of the review was the provision of induction sessions for external examiners. External examiners are required to attend meetings of boards of examiners and to submit annual reports on a pro forma. External examiners' reports are scrutinised by the Academic Registry and then reviewed by the Quality Assurance Task Group. Significant issues - either of adverse criticism or concerning good practice for possible wider dissemination - are brought to the attention of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning). These matters are then referred to either the Teaching and Learning Task Group or the Quality Assurance Task Group for action.

36    The review team read a broad sample of external examiner reports, noting that the overwhelming majority of the reports were favourable both as to the institution's processes and also concerning the standards which students attained. The team also read minutes of meetings of the Quality Assurance Task Group at which external examiner reports were discussed. The Task Group paid particular attention to reports which expressed reservations about academic standards and or process; in some cases substantiated adverse comment from external examiners has lead to an IQA being brought forward or a requirement that the programme in question be revalidated.

37    From review of the relevant documentation and observations of meetings, the review team concluded that the institution's systems and procedures in relation to external examining were fit for purpose, operating as intended in accordance with the UWB and QAA codes of practice, and were making an effective contribution to security of academic standards. The use of external examiners supports a

judgement of confidence in UWB's present and likely future management of academic standards.

## Student admissions and the use made of progression and completion statistics

38    UWB's admissions policy is set by the Student Recruitment and Admissions Task Group and applications are processed by the Admissions and Student Records section of the Academic Registry. At local level, each school appoints an Admissions Tutor who takes departmental decisions. At least once a year, a meeting is held between the Recruitment and Admissions Task Group and Admissions Tutors. The Chair of the Task Group has delegated authority to resolve any differences between schools and the admissions office.

39    The institution believes that central administration of the assessment process helps to ensure that its specification of academic standards is applied consistently across subject areas. Its student records system enables all marks to be entered at school level into a 'Gradebook', which is part of the Student Records Database. After all marks have been entered at school level, the Gradebook may not be altered at that level and changes may only be made centrally with the approval of Senate Examining Boards. While internal audits have found that schools monitor student progress effectively, administrative procedures also ensure that a central check is also made to confirm outcomes.

40    The review team were able to confirm that progression statistics were carefully compiled and checked so that outcomes could be considered reliable. The team noted that progression to the next level was achieved by the overwhelming majority of students. In the academic year 2004-05 only 1.8 per cent failed to progress. The team came to the view that the very high rates of retention reflected effective monitoring and carefully monitoring of student progress, with early identification of students in danger of not meeting progression requirements enabling generally effective remedial action to be taken.

## Assessment practice and procedures

41    Procedures governing assessment practice are set out in detail in the Quality Manual which identifies the levels of achievement which students need to demonstrate in order to progress. The Manual confirms that assessment must judge individual achievement against published learning outcomes which relate to the FHEQ.

42    UWB is aware that knowledge of its assessment procedures is not uniform across the institution and has developed procedures designed to improve awareness. The Academic Registrar and Assistant Registrar attended a sample of boards of examiners, identifying strengths and weaknesses measured against the processes articulated in the Quality Manual. Issues relating to variability in approach to students with apparently similar levels of performance and to limited knowledge of procedures set out in the Manual, were identified and reported to the Quality Assurance Task Group. The Task Group determined that these visits be repeated during the subsequent examination cycle with a further report which would concentrate on areas where deficiencies had been identified. The review team considered this to be an example of helpful reflexivity.

43    The review team saw examples of a variety of assessment methods being used in some schools. The Internal Quality Audit process identified a strong link between teaching, assessment and feedback and insights derived from staff research. External examiner reports and the evidence of examination boards both confirm that competent, research-active staff have developed approaches to assessment which are both diverse and targeted at appropriate levels in relation to the FHEQ.

44    Through scrutiny of documentation and meetings with staff and students, the review team established that UWB's Code of Practice on assessment was in general implemented with consistency. The team found evidence of variability in the stipulations for the use of viva voce examinations, and accordingly considers it desirable that UWB review its approach to viva voce examinations in assessment to establish and secure consistency in the criteria for the use of such examinations.

## The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

### Feedback from students, graduates and employers

45    Student satisfaction surveys were undertaken in 2004 and 2005 with participation rates increasing from 11 per cent to 18.5 per cent of students. While acknowledging that the response rate does not provide a representative sample, UWB still considers the information derived from the surveys to be useful. The outcomes of the surveys are discussed by a range of consultative and decision-making bodies, including the student and staff forums and the Institutional Review Task Group. Particular issues identified in the surveys are referred to the relevant member of staff or school for action. UWB was the only institution in Wales to participate in the pilot of the National Student Survey in 2004.

46    Student feedback is collected at the end of modules as a routine element of the quality assurance process and feeds into annual monitoring and periodic review. The institution's own monitoring systems have identified some variability of practice in collection of feedback both within UWB and also between in-house and collaborative provision. Action has been taken towards eliminating this inconsistency. The review team read minutes from a range of staff-student committees which demonstrated full and reasoned responses to matters raised by students.

47    Feedback from students is also gathered through their representation on task groups. The review team found that the institution encouraged students to contribute agenda items for meetings and that students accepted the opportunities thus provided. Student input to discussion was  valued highly by staff. Student Union officers confirmed that they had been fully involved in discussions during the

restructuring of academic and deliberative structures and that the use of task groups had improved the speed of response to matters raised.

48    UWB has links with employers at institutional and local levels. The Careers and Employability Task Group includes representation from employers and from Careers Wales. The University Innovation Bangor Unit leads Third Mission Activity, providing another source of information from employers. More conventional sources of feedback include professional bodies, placement providers and employer input into module and programme development.

## The means by which the quality of teaching staff is assured: appointment, appraisal and reward

49    UWB's direction and aspirations regarding scholarship and teaching are evident in the Strategic Plan, the Mission and the Human Resources (HR) Strategy. In the Strategic Plan UWB expresses the intention to 'focus on developing and supporting existing staff who contribute to research and teaching excellence' as well as investing in new staff appointments. The Strategic Plan also states that 'every department is charged with the responsibility of achieving a close alignment between teaching and research'.

50    The HR Department is responsible to the Registrar and workforce planning is managed by the Planning and Finance functions. An HR Task Group reports to the Executive. A new head of HR took up post in September 2006; in the interim the two Deputy Directors led the implementation of HR policies. UWB highlighted the objective within the HR Strategy that the institution 'recruit and retain the best quality staff with the skills necessary to achieve the institution's academic aims and objectives'. At the time of writing, the institution was in the process of recruiting to 50 new posts intended to strengthen the institution's research profile and to contribute to the academic development of the colleges.

51    HR manages the recruitment process and is responsible for ensuring compliance with relevant legislation and institutional policies. Schools have responsibility for drawing up the job descriptions and specifications for academic posts which largely focus on research skills and achievements. All short-listed candidates for academic posts are required to undertake a presentation to allow teaching ability to be assessed. The interview process also probes expertise in curriculum design and use of relevant technologies. There is a separate assessment of ability to teach through the medium of Welsh where this is a requirement of the post.

52    There is a mandatory three-year probationary period during which the head of school reports annually on progress. The institution stated that most appointments were confirmed at the end of the probationary period. Recently appointed staff, in meetings with the review team, reported that they had found that a lengthy probation period gave them appropriate opportunity to develop their teaching and research skills and also to derive benefit from peer observation. All new staff participate in a brief staff induction process; at the time of the review, UWB had recently appointed a Training Officer charged with developing the induction programme to provide more pre-employment information. The induction includes introductions from the HR Department, departmental induction and also institution-wide events covering issues relating to the overall mission and the institution's strategy and values.

53    All new academic staff who do not possess a relevant teaching qualification must enrol on and complete the Teaching in Higher Education Certificate (tHE), run by the Research Institute on Enhancing Learning, as a condition of appointment. The scheme is accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The Teaching and Learning Task Group identified some variability in approaches to local supervision of tHE participants and inconsistency in sharing of knowledge and provision of feedback to inexperienced

members of staff. The Group has provided advice on these matters to departments to secure a consistent approach. Feedback from participants in the HE scheme is generally very favourable and has been taken into account in the development of the programme and its implementation.

54    From scrutiny of the relevant policies and procedures and discussion with staff the review team concluded that, despite evidence of variation between schools, existing procedures to secure the competence of academic staff on appointment were generally working well, were appreciated by staff and were fit for purpose.

## The means by which the quality of teaching staff is assured: staff support and development

55    The Strategic Plan and the HR Strategy considered together set out UWB's approach to scholarship and teaching. The Strategic Plan focuses on recruitment rather than ongoing staff support; the HR Strategy 2005-08 identifies the need for a comprehensive staff development policy. In April 2006, the institution produced a paper, 'A wider picture of all staff and educational development'. It noted that 'while existing provision from all groups has been commended, it is also seen as fragmentary'. The paper argued for a coherent approach to staff development by bringing together current staff development providers across the institution in a Staff and Educational Development Group reporting to the Registrar through the Teaching and Learning Task Group. The aim was to build on existing proven staff development activities to provide a more systematic approach.

56    The review team met staff to discuss the contribution of the HR section to the implementation and embedding of the revised structures. They encountered a clear commitment to producing a more systematic and coherent approach to development needs to replace the existing 'menu driven' approach to staff development. The Deputy Directors of HR conducted meetings with the shadow heads of colleges and the heads of schools to discuss staff development plans. The team concluded

that implementation of the coordinated approach to staff development was being approached vigorously and under central direction.

57    Pedagogic development and professionalism are led by the School of Education through the Research Institute on Enhancing Learning. At the time of the review an Academic Development Unit had recently been established within the School with the aim of bringing together different providers of pedagogic development from across the institution. One of the objectives of restructuring was to enhance knowledge sharing. In discussions with staff, the review team heard of a range of examples in which the revised groupings were facilitating academic collaboration. Knowledge sharing is additionally being approached through the establishment of knowledge 'champions', an academic forum to develop relationships between colleges, University Innovation Bangor and central services. School 'away days' are also used to share knowledge about teaching and pedagogical initiatives.

58    Through meetings with staff, the review team learned that new staff were appreciative of the support they received via the institution's mentoring scheme. Some concern was expressed about variability across the institution in terms of local supervision of tHE participants. Staff groups referred to gaps both in the sharing of knowledge and in feedback to inexperienced members of staff.

59    Appraisal for academic staff is conducted through the compulsory Academic Review Scheme, introduced in 2002, which focuses on support and development needs. The scheme is conducted by academic peers on a biennial basis. An appraisal scheme for administrative staff was established in the academic year 2004-05. The Director of HR provides reports on the operation of the scheme to the Human Resources Task Group. At the time of the review, the scheme had recently been revised to emphasise career development and performance review.

60    Under the institution's Peer Observation Scheme, all staff teaching should be observed annually. The review team noted that peer observation did not form part of the quality assurance process in every academic school. UWB anticipates that the move to the college system will strengthen the process as peer observers will be appointed from across the college rather than at school level, thus providing both a wider range of expertise and increased objectivity.

61    Senior tutors of academic schools normally meet three times a year for knowledge sharing. The review team found that senior tutors were very familiar with institutional procedures in their own schools and departments but less aware of governance procedures and the mechanisms of institutional decision-making. The team formed the view that further development work with senior tutors would enable the benefits of restructuring to be better understood at that level and thus cascaded through the schools, contributing to the emergent enhancement agenda.

62    UWB works within the National Framework Agreement for modernising pay systems and structures. The HR Strategy 2005-08 includes targets and measures in relation to the Agreement which, when fully implemented, will have an impact on grading structures and promotions. Existing systems for advancement and promotion are clearly defined and well-understood by staff. In meetings with the review team, staff confirmed that the promotion process was transparent with teaching and learning expertise, administration, and third-mission work - and not just research activity - were all recognised and valued as criteria for promotion.

63    A scheme of Teaching Fellowships has been in operation since the mid-1990s. The award of a Teaching Fellowship recognises 'outstanding contributions to teaching and the pastoral care of students'. Heads of school and students submit nominations, supported by evidence of the expertise of the candidate, to a

Teaching Fellowships Panel. An Academy of Teaching Fellows has been established to facilitate identification and the dissemination of good teaching practice. UWB is frank in acknowledging that membership of the HEA, at 5-6 per cent of academic staff, is low; the institution's enhancement agenda includes plans to increase HEA membership. Through meetings with staff, the review team learned that some senior staff considered that leveraging benefits from the Fellowship scheme should be an institutional priority. The team would encourage such an initiative since it was not clear either that the Fellowship scheme was being developed to its fullest potential or that appropriate opportunities for active engagement with the HEA, either through work with the subject centres or by applications for National Teaching Fellowships, or otherwise, were being exploited.

64    The review team found that the institution has policies and procedures in place for recruitment, induction, probation and appraisal that secure and develop the competence of its academic staff. The tHE provides effective training and development to new academic staff who do not possess a relevant teaching qualification. Arrangements for promotion are transparent, with clearly defined criteria that recognise not only research activity but a range of proficiencies and expertise. The recently established Academic Development Unit is a promising innovation which should bring additional coherence to current institutional approaches to academic development. The parallel Staff and Educational Development Group should also provide a more systematic approach to staff development.

## Learning support resources

65    The Strategic Plan (2005-10) expresses UWB's commitment to 'high quality modern student services and integrated student support and administration'. The Plan also expresses the intention to invest in more e-learning. There is a Head of IT and an IT and Network Task Group maintains an overview of the provision and provides strategic direction for its further

development. PCs are provided for student use across the institution and in the halls of residence on a ratio of 1:7 full-time equivalent students. A number of the computer rooms have 24-hour access. In September 2002 the institution introduced a virtual learning environment (VLE) which, at the time of the review was available, but not universally used, for all modules. The Bangor Portal is a secure website offering access to a range of services for staff and students; the review team considered this to be a useful resource that helped students to manage their learning online. IT training and support are provided centrally. The most recent internal Student Satisfaction Survey found that students considered the levels of support for computing and IT to be highly satisfactory.

66    In meetings with the review team staff expressed appreciation of the help offered centrally and locally by IT Services and from colleagues sharing knowledge to develop online learning opportunities through the VLE. A staff/student survey was administered to assess training needs and how to enhance usage of the facility. Just over half of the modules use the VLE; user feedback indicates some variability in effectiveness of use of the VLE but also some pockets of excellence, including the Welsh language facility. The survey found that further training was required at all levels, that a policy for universal adoption was required and that linkages within the VLE could add to more integrated services, by way of example with plagiarism software. Work on the outcomes of the survey demonstrates that proactive approaches are being made to offer drop-in services, demonstrations and linkages to pedagogic developments.

67    The library operates across eight sites, including a branch at Wrexham. In addition to over 900,000 printed items, the library also offers access to electronic journal and books. There is an interlibrary loans service and a short-loan service for items in heavy demand. Students are provided with induction to the library facilities. Each school nominates a representative to liaise with the library on local needs for library support. Librarians no longer have direct subject-specific responsibilities but academic staff confirmed in meetings with the review team that they were satisfied with levels of provision and with their input to decision-making on library provision. The library service has been highly rated in both the UWB student satisfaction surveys and the National Student Survey.

68    The review team considered that learning support for students using the medium of Welsh was particularly strong. The library has an excellent collection of Welsh medium resources. The use of the VLE is well-embedded in modules taught in the medium of Welsh.

## Academic guidance, support and supervision

69    The institution requires the development of assessment criteria to be available to students via departmental or module handbooks. Learning outcomes are also required at module level and these must be clearly related to the assessment methods employed. Students who met the review team indicated that this enabled them to understand what was required of them at different levels of achievement.

70    In meetings with undergraduate students, the review team learned that feedback on academic work was generally effective. The institution requires feedback to be provided within a four-week period during term-time, but students reported that, although some tutors were more punctilious than others, feedback was normally provided within a fortnight of submission. Students appreciated that feedback often followed the format of the assignment marking scheme, enabling them to see which aspects of their work needed particular attention. It appeared that, where feedback was deemed to be a problem at school level, students knew how to raise issues. They confirmed that complaints were taken seriously and that action usually followed. The postgraduate students who met the team, however, expressed some concern about the speed with which assessed work was returned.

71    In meetings with the review team, postgraduate research students expressed warm approval for the institution's recently established Research Students' Forum where issues concerning induction, progress and assessment could be raised. The students did, however, express some concern that overall management of postgraduate research students appeared to be fragmented.

72    The review team noted the widespread recognition among students, that staff research influenced teaching and informed curriculum design. The review team considered this to be a particularly effective aspect of academic support since students could be confident that the teaching they received operated at the threshold of available knowledge and was also appropriately and securely linked to information on assessment which students understood and which aided their academic progress.

## Personal support and guidance

73    The Student Services Centre, which is part of the Academic Registry, provides a range of professional welfare and support services for students. There is a counselling service, a student health service, and a Money Support Unit. The Academic Registry is also responsible for the Centre for Careers and Opportunities which offers a wide range of advice and guidance services. A specialist Disability Support Team includes trained disability advisers, dyslexia specialists and an educational psychologist. UWB has a relatively high proportion of students with the attribution of dyslexia. The Dyslexia Unit is based within the School of Psychology which has an international reputation for its research in this area. Within the Student Services Centre there is a full-time adviser to provide support for international students. The Department of English provides English Language support for international students through a specialist unit, ELCOS.

74    The support provided by the Student Services Centre is appraised through user surveys. The outcomes of the most recent surveys, including the UWB 2005 Student Satisfaction Survey, are consistently favourable. In meetings with the review team, students confirmed the effectiveness of support provided through the Student Services Centre and the specialist units.

75    The Welsh Assembly Government has set a target that, by 2010, 7 per cent of students in Wales should be studying an element of their courses through the medium of Welsh; UWB has more than fulfilled this target and has more students studying through the medium of Welsh than any other higher education institution in Wales. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Welsh Medium) chairs the Welsh Medium Task Group which oversees activities in this area. In minutes of meetings of the Task Group, the review team found evidence of active consideration of issues such as the use of the VLE for Welsh medium delivery and inclusion of Welsh language research in the Research Assessment Excercise. In meetings with the team, students spoke highly of the Welsh language provision, the calibre of which is confirmed by the Student Satisfaction Surveys.

76    Induction of students is coordinated by Student Services. Students receive pre-entry information in preparation for their arrival and, on arrival, a comprehensive Student Guide to the institution, its services and procedures. The Centre for Careers and Opportunities coordinates a Peer Guide Scheme whereby second and third-year students support new undergraduate students as they settle into life at UWB. The peer guides receive formal training for their role and are also provided with a handbook. Both the effectiveness of this training and the contribution of the Peer Guide Scheme to successful induction and support of students are evaluated and the outcomes used to develop the scheme further. Additional Welsh speaking peer guides were recruited in response to student feedback. The review team concluded that the provision of peer guides for students during induction was reflective of the institution's careful overall approach to support for students throughout their undergraduate or postgraduate programmes. Central induction processes are complemented by local briefings

to introduce students to their departments and their programmes of study. Postgraduate students are briefed on the Graduate programme. An orientation programme for international students is in place.

77    The overall approach to induction was appraised in Internal Quality Audit (IQA) and found to be operating effectively. The review team discussed the induction process with students and reviewed the relevant documentation; the team noted some variation in practice for off-campus students since timetabled provision did not always take account of the practical difficulties of attendance. Overall, students expressed satisfaction with their induction and introduction to the institution and their programmes of study. The review team concurs with the findings of IQA in relation to the induction process, and considers the operation of the Peer Guide Scheme to be a feature of good practice in student support.

78    UWB has a well-established personal tutor scheme, identified by the institution as 'a key element in the guidance and support mechanisms for students'. All students meet their personal tutors during induction and are expected to have three meetings with the tutor each academic year. A senior tutor is appointed in each school and coordinates local tutoring arrangements; all the senior tutors meet regularly as a group to share experience. The review team found evidence of considerable variation in the effectiveness of the personal tutor scheme and noted that the institution intended to revise its processes. UWB institution may wish to consider the importance of further development of personal development profiles as part of its overall review.

79    The Student Services/Students' Union Task Group identified the need for a review of the system to confirm that it was operating as intended. Accordingly a Review of Personal Tutor Scheme Task and End Group was convened, completing its work in March 2006. The Task and End Group produced guidance notes for senior and personal tutors. The Group

also noted the importance of tutorial support for taught postgraduate students and referred the matter to the colleges for consideration as they developed their new structures. The Teaching and Learning Task Group was asked to consider the integration of Personal Development Planning and the personal tutor system. The Task and End Group established training sessions for personal tutors and recommended that such training be part of formal staff induction. The review considered that the conduct of this review and the focused identification and implementation of action points provided clear evidence of the effectiveness of the use of task and end groups to deal with specific issues.

80    The review team concluded that the institution, including UWB Student Services and the Students' Union, provided a good range of support systems which were appreciated by students. The team also noted that students at non-campus based locations valued the support which the institution offered. Regular user-surveys of individual services are carried out and the team found consistent evidence that the institution both reflected on and, where appropriate responded to, the information received from student satisfaction surveys. Examination of the documentation from the Student Services/Students' Union Task Group confirmed that it maintained an effective overview of the operation of student support.

## Procedures for student complaints and appeals

81    Under arrangements for devolution of authority from the Federal University, UWB is now responsible for appeals against an academic decision at levels 1 and 2. Appeals at this level are considered by the Senate Appeal Board. At the time of the review, appeals at level 3 were considered by the Federal University through its Verification and Appeals Procedure.

82    Student complaints are considered under a Student Grievance Procedure. Generally, UWB would hope to resolve issues informally and at

the local level. Matters that cannot be redressed satisfactorily through informal channels are referred to a Panel of Enquiry which includes external representation. The number of complaints is increasing, as they are in most service-led organisations, but few proceed to the formal stage of investigation.

## The institution's use of external reference points

83    The review team found that UWB had taken careful account of both the separate elements of the Academic Infrastructure and the additional frameworks specific to the Welsh context, such as the Welsh Credit Framework. The general approach to the *Code of practice* has been to appraise existing policy and practice as each section was published and make adjustments as necessary. The institution has developed its own suite of codes of practice taking due account of the precepts of QAA's *Code of practice*. UWB stresses in particular a commitment, in responding to the *Code of practice*, to developing greater consistency in assessment procedures and to strengthening arrangements for the revalidation of programmes to complement its internal quality audit processes. Examples of specific responses to guidance in the *Code of practice* include the establishment of a common degree classification system, uniform penalties for late submission of work and common weightings for modules at Levels 2 and 3.

84    There is consistent use of the FHEQ to calibrate programmes of study. From documentation and observation of meetings, the review team confirmed that validation, review and monitoring procedures all include a requirement for verification that programmes of study were set at the appropriate levels. The Manual sets out rules and procedures for assessment that make explicit use of the level descriptors in the FHEQ; specifically, UWB requires student assessment to be based upon descriptive outcomes at each level of the main qualification.

85    Learning outcomes must be articulated in all programme specifications and the Manual

states that 'all learning outcomes for the programme of study should be assessed for successful completion by students'. The pro forma for external examiner reports require external examiners to comment on the appropriateness of assessment methods in relation to learning outcomes, course content and the teaching and learning methods employed. The review team's scrutiny of external examiner reports confirmed that, in the great majority of cases, assessment methods were deemed appropriate in respect of level and overall demand. The team concluded that UWB was making effective use of all elements of the Academic Infrastructure and the additional frameworks specific to the Welsh context, such as the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales*, in its management of the quality and academic standards of its provision.

## Commentary on the institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards

86    At the time of the review, the institution was moving to give enhancement greater prominence in its quality agenda. The Strategic Plan commits the institution to promoting innovation in teaching and learning, to upgrading the teaching and learning environment and to developing a Welsh ethos which enables Welsh medium provision to be expanded. It likewise wishes to enhance the student experience from what it considers already to be a very high base.

87    The senior management has also focused on the development and enhancement of UWB's research profile in order to secure a productive, vibrant and sustainable research culture. At the time of the review, the Research Committee was putting in place a range of monitoring strategies, using statistics on research applications and success rates to support its leadership role and the Research Strategy. Emphasis has also been given by the Welsh Medium Task Group to the promotion of high-quality research through the medium of Welsh. The institution has secured significant

research collaboration funding and is looking to increased research collaboration within Wales to underpin the strategy. The review team considered that the research leadership coupled with the breadth and depth of research activity by the academic community across the institution was a strength.

88    Although the institution has an effective quality assurance process in place, the review team shares the view of the Quality Assurance Task Group that enhancement opportunities, including identified areas of good practice, are not always recognised or grasped. The Teaching and Learning Group has also noted that the use of IT is not yet a sufficiently explicit element in quality assurance and enhancement processes. Further, as the Task Group has reported, annual reviews and internal audits reveal a number of variations, not usually in themselves serious, and also a lack of knowledge by some staff of key aspects of the Quality Manual. The team found that there was widespread recognition by senior management and also by the relevant task and subgroups of the need to give greater priority to the enhancement agenda. The institution is making some progress in this respect but may wish to consider specific strategies for accelerating progress during the period covered by the present Strategic Plan.

## Reliability of information

89    In meetings with both undergraduate and postgraduate students, the review team learned that most students felt that adequate information about their courses had been made available to them. Prospectuses were judged to give accurate representation of courses. Some students found course handbooks particularly valuable since they provided specific information about the nature of study required, and the assignments to be completed, so that they could readily understand what standards were required of them and how they were expected to progress in their understanding of subject matter.

90    The review team saw evidence to indicate that UWB was meeting Teaching Quality Information requirements, as set out in HEFCW's document W0405HE, *Teaching Quality Information (TQI) requirements for Higher Education in Wales*. As required by this document, the team noted that information relating to the institutional context; student admission, progression and completion data; and information relating to the internal procedures used to assure quality and standards were readily available. Other relevant information appears on the Higher Education and Research Opportunities website. The review team was confident that UWB would continue to cooperate fully in providing such information as required.

## Features of good practice

91    The following features of good practice were noted:

i    the integration of academic planning with transparent resource distribution, both of which clearly support the implementation of the institution's Strategic Plan (paragraph 9)

ii    the use of Task Groups and Task and End Groups to provide focused and expeditious discussion of UWB business (paragraph 11)

iii    the full and demonstrable commitment to the Welsh language and Welsh culture with the Welsh Medium Task Group/Grwp Tasg Cyfrwng-Cymraeg, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Welsh Medium), providing effective and energetic leadership in this area (paragraph 12)

iv    the close working relationship and effective liaison between the Teaching and Learning Group and the Quality Assurance Task Group, which provides for effective and coordinated oversight of the operation and development of UWB's provision (paragraph 20)

v    the policy governing the closure of programmes of study which includes appropriate consultation with both staff and students and which protects the interests of students (paragraph 29)

vi     the provision of peer guides for students at their induction, which is indicative of UWB's careful approach to support for students which lasts throughout their time at the institution (paragraph 76).

## Recommendations for action

92     As UWB continues to develop its quality and academic standards management arrangements, particularly as it undertakes additional responsibilities accruing from devolution from the University of Wales, it may wish to consider the advisability of:

i     taking steps to ensure that its committee papers and minutes are circulated in a timely manner to support informed and considered discussion in UWB's deliberative fora (paragraph 15).

93     The review team further considers that it would be desirable for UWB to:

ii     monitor the operation of the Task Groups to confirm that the system of appointment on grounds of particular expertise does not limit the participation of students and staff in the deliberative processes of the institution (paragraph 11)

iii     make the recording of planned actions, including identification of responsibilities and deadlines, explicit in the minutes of meetings (paragraph 15)

iv     review the approach to viva voce examinations in assessment to establish and secure consistency in the criteria for the use of such examinations (paragraph 43).

# Appendix

## The University of Wales, Bangor's response to the institutional review report

UWB welcomes the judgement in the report that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The University found the institutional review process to be open, robust, fair and constructive.

We welcome the features of good practice highlighted in the report and we are in the process of drawing up an action plan in response to the recommendations identified.