



Higher Education Review: Wales of University of Wales Trinity Saint David

June 2015

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review: Wales conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at University of Wales Trinity Saint David. The review took place from 8 to 12 June 2015 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Professor John Baldock
- Mrs Claire Blanchard
- Ms Hayley Burns
- Professor Diane Meehan
- Mr Mathew T Kitching (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review: Wales the QAA review team:

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

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

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

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code.

² QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

³ Higher Education Review: Wales web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Higher-Education-Review-Wales.aspx.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about University of Wales Trinity Saint David

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

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

Good practice

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

- The comprehensive range of academic and pastoral support provided for all students (Expectations B3, B4 and B11).
- The use of an interactive online system to gather and act on student feedback (Expectation B5).
- The engagement of the University with its collaborative partners through the roles of Partnership Co-ordinators and Partnership Team Leaders (Expectation B10).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

By December 2015:

- clarify the membership, attendance, remit and reporting requirements of each of the boards within the University's examination board structure (Expectations B6 and B7)
- adopt a consistent approach to ensuring that all students are provided with clear grading criteria which enable them to understand what is required to achieve a particular grade (Expectation B6)
- ensure that assessment feedback is provided in line with University requirements (Expectation B6)
- strengthen the reporting arrangements for external examining to ensure more effective oversight of collaborative provision (Expectations B7 and B10).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The University's work to inform students about action taken in response to their feedback (Expectations B5 and B4).
- The work of the Student Experience Department to support the Students' Union in strengthening the student representative system (Expectation B5).

- The steps being taken to ensure a common understanding among staff and students of the new extenuating circumstances procedure (Expectation B6).
- The work to ensure external examiners' reports are made available to students on the student portal (Expectation B7).

About the University of Wales Trinity Saint David

The University of Wales Trinity Saint David (the University; UWTSD) is a Royal chartered University established in October 2012 through the merger of University of Wales Trinity Saint David (TSD) with Swansea Metropolitan University (SMU). TSD was itself formed through the merger of the University of Wales, Lampeter and Trinity University College, Carmarthen in 2010.

The University has led the development of a dual sector university structure, known as the UWTSD Group, as a framework to enable collaboration with other institutions in the region to provide an integrated approach to curriculum planning and to strengthen progression routes. As part of this development, Coleg Sir Gâr and Coleg Ceredigion merged into the UWTSD Group in 2013-14 and are now represented on the key academic decision-making bodies within the University, while maintaining their own distinct institutional identities.

The University has campuses in Carmarthen, Lampeter, London and five campuses in Swansea, each with their own distinct identities. It also has a presence in Cardiff and, through its dual sector partners, at a range of other locations in south-west Wales. There is no single 'main' campus and most of the faculties work across at least two locations. Staff have a 'home' campus in the sense of an office base, but the majority are expected to work across campuses, travelling as and when required. Contracts have been exchanged for the development of a new £100m waterfront campus in Swansea, supported by the Welsh Government, which, when completed, will enable the University to consolidate its provision in Swansea. Migration to the new campus is expected to commence in 2017-18.

In addition, in October 2014 formal agreement was reached on the relocation of the headquarters of the Welsh medium television channel, S4C, to the Carmarthen campus, a development based on the co-location of S4C and other organisations to form a creative hub in a landmark building. The University believes that, taken together, these developments will transform the learning environments that are provided in Swansea and Carmarthen, and will complement the significant steps already taken to enhance the campuses in Lampeter and London.

In March 2015 the University had a total of 11,241 students, of which 1,746 were studying at its collaborative partner institutions. 8,704 students (around 77 per cent) were undergraduates and 3,690 students (around 32 per cent) were studying on a part-time basis. The largest number of students, 4,812 in total (around 43 per cent), was based on the Swansea campuses. The University is a leading provider of Welsh-medium provision. In 2012-13, 20.5 per cent of the University's students undertook part or all of their studies through the medium of Welsh.

The University's academic offering is broad in range, with provision in all but one of the JACS Subject Groups and awards ranging from levels 3 to 8 of the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* (CQFW). Its academic structure was agreed as part of the 2012 merger process and originally comprised seven faculties, largely based on the pre-existing faculties in the founding institutions. Subsequent refinements have resulted in the creation, with effect from September 2014, of a more streamlined structure of five faculties, each containing a number of Schools. The University continues to diversify its curriculum offer and the flexibility of its programmes of study, working closely with its structural partner institutions

Coleg Ceredigion and Coleg Sir Gâr to widen opportunities for students within south-west Wales.

Since October 2012, substantial progress has been made on integrating the governance and academic frameworks of the founding institutions. Work continues in a range of areas, including aspects of the academic and professional services structures, policy development, and the establishment of a full suite of regulations and procedures for the merged University.

Historically, the University and its founding institutions had placed their degree-awarding powers in abeyance and offered degrees of the University of Wales (UW) but began to award its own degrees in July 2014. In addition, the University is licensed by Pearson to offer Higher National qualifications and works with a small number of other awarding bodies, mainly in relation to professional qualifications. However, it continues to work closely with UW and to be represented on its committees, and it is expected that UW will become part of the UWTSD Group by the end of the decade.

The University mission is 'transforming education; transforming lives'. Its vision, values and strategic priorities are set out in its Strategic Plan 2013-17. In addition to completing the integration process following the 2012 merger, key outcomes for the planning period include improving recruitment, retention and the student experience; developing a core curriculum that furthers creativity and enterprise; and promoting international education. The Plan places particular emphasis on the University's strategic commitment to sustainable development, and to embedding sustainability as a core principle across all aspects of University life, including the curriculum. It is underpinned by a number of supporting strategies, including those relating to research; learning, teaching and enhancement; sustainability and international activities, together with a strategy for widening access and community engagement currently in the final stages of approval. The University's Research Strategy, approved by Senate in July 2014, aims to support the range of research that takes place while focusing on targeted areas which align with the research priorities set by the Welsh and UK Governments, the European Commission and the Research Council.

The Strategic Plan sets out the University's commitment to Wales, both in terms of its close relationships with employers and communities, and in terms of its role as a major provider of bilingual and Welsh medium higher education. The University is also active in contributing to the development of Welsh medium educational resources and has its own publication house, Canolfan Peniarth. The headquarters of Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol are located in Carmarthen at the University's Cultural Enterprise Centre and the University is represented on the Coleg's major committees. The University has been awarded a Welsh Government grant of £300,000 for the establishment of a Welsh Centre in Carmarthen. Promotion of the Welsh language is a continuing process, particularly on the Swansea campuses where its use is less prevalent, and a Welsh medium and Bilingual Education Strategy for the merged University was approved by Senate in December 2014. Simultaneously the Students' Union is working towards becoming a signatory to the *Welsh Language Charter for Welsh Universities' Students' Unions*, developed by NUS Wales.

The University's existing collaborative partnerships fall into three broad categories: regional partnerships with further education colleges including, but not restricted to, its structural partners in the UWTSD Group; other partnerships formed through SMU; and some new partnerships, mainly with UW former collaborative centres. A small number of additional partnerships are in development and one existing partnership is in the process of termination.

The previous QAA Institutional Reviews of SMU and TSD took place prior to the merger, in March 2009 and June 2012 respectively. The reports were considered at the appropriate committees of the founding institutions and action plans were produced and tracked to

completion. A QAA mid-review follow-up report on SMU, with subsequent action plan, was produced in April 2012. Subsequently the reports were revisited in 2013-14 to evaluate the progress of the merged University against the comments made by QAA, and this has led to a programme of work overseen by the Senate. QAA also undertook two reviews of the merged University, focusing on its foundation degree provision (in May 2013) and its London campus (in July 2014). The report on foundation degree provision made several recommendations for consideration and progress against the action plan has been tracked by Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC). The report on the London Campus made no recommendations but an update was provided for QAA in January 2015. Both reports provide confirmation that, although the merged University as a single entity has no established track record in managing quality and standards, its approach in these areas is generally sound.

Since the merger there have been significant achievements in a range of areas that were the subject of comment by QAA in 2009 and 2012. These include an external review of academic committee documentation and the subsequent implementation of a committee house-style designed to facilitate more consistent and comprehensive reporting; the introduction of new procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review and their continuing development and enhancement; a review and re-writing of the assessment regulations, in particular to make clearer the distinction between regulation and guidance. Also included are the establishment of a single set of procedures relating to external examiners, and a single locus of responsibility for managing their appointment and reports; the development of a new approach to student representation across campuses; the launch of a new website and, more recently, the development of a new staff and student portal, as well as the introduction of a new Procedural Framework for Collaborative Provision.

The review team recognised the significant challenges presented by the merger and the progress made in addressing them. Inevitably, in a small number of areas, progress has been directly affected, but significant work is continuing in these areas, including the development of a comprehensive and consistent set of statistical data for the purposes of maintaining oversight of quality and standards, in particular for more complex or non-traditional programmes, a strategy for learning resources, and the implementation of comprehensive new systems for staff development, appraisal and reward. Historical underinvestment in IT on the Swansea campuses, and the subsequent diversion of both human and financial resources to resolving those problems, has delayed implementation to some extent but good progress has been made. Overall, priority has been given to the development of an appropriate and unified regulatory and quality assurance framework for the new University and to ensuring that these new arrangements are understood and implemented consistently across campuses.

The University welcomed the value of the review process, particularly in the opportunities it has provided for reflection across the whole of the merged institution on the effectiveness of arrangements for enhancing quality and maintaining standards. It sees the review as an opportunity to take stock of the arrangements which have been established across the merged institution, to engage in constructive dialogue about the progress being made, and to confirm its plans for the future.

Explanation of the findings about the University of Wales Trinity Saint David

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The regulations governing taught and research degree awards are set out in the University's Academic Quality Handbook (AQH), published on the Academic Office webpages in Welsh and English and provided in hard copy for members of staff and partner institutions. Additional guidance and templates are provided through web-based appendices. The University's award regulations are designed to meet the requirements of the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* (CQFW) and articulate with the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the *Framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area* (FQ-EHEA). Qualifications are aligned with the FHEQ in respect of levels, credits and award nomenclature. The AQH includes explicit statements about the amount of credit that can be awarded for prior learning and experiential learning and the procedures for its recognition.

1.2 The University's processes for programme approval, monitoring and review are also contained within the AQH. These procedures require that programmes are developed with reference to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), the FHEQ, the CQFW and other relevant external reference points including PSRB requirements where appropriate. Together these frameworks enable the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.3 The team reviewed the academic quality regulations for taught and research programmes, minutes of committee meetings, guidance relating to programme development, reports from programme validation, revalidation and major review, external examiner reports

and a range of definitive programme documents. The team also met a range of academic and support staff and students.

1.4 The University has systematically mapped its processes and procedures to the Quality Code and the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The regulations governing the processes of programme approval, monitoring and review, set out in the AQH and its appendices, make explicit reference to the Quality Code and its constituent parts. Programme learning outcomes are written with reference to Subject Benchmark Statements and guidance on qualifications characteristics. Adherence to these requirements is checked as part of the University's validation process.

1.5 Ongoing alignment with external reference points is achieved through the University's monitoring and review processes including Annual Programme Review and Major Review. External examiners comment explicitly on whether programmes of study meet external expectations in respect of national frameworks and academic standards.

1.6 Evidence provided to the review team demonstrated the University's participation in the development and review of the Quality Code, FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. Staff confirmed that they are kept up to date in respect to external requirements via a number of mechanisms including the support and guidance provided for programme development and validation and through the annual staff development week.

1.7 The review team considers that the design and delivery of the University's qualifications makes appropriate use of external reference points in setting academic standards and ensuring that qualifications reflect national qualification, credit, and Subject Benchmark Statements and characteristics. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.8 The Senate has overall responsibility for ensuring that academic standards are maintained and that the University has, and implements, appropriate regulations, policies and procedures, including for 'the assessment and examination of academic performance, assuring academic standards and the award of academic qualifications'. Senate delegates aspects of its responsibilities to its standing committees including Academic Quality and Standards Committee, Academic Policy Committee, Learning Teaching and Enhancement Committee, Research Committee, Collaborative Provision Committee and faculty boards. At faculty level, faculty boards are responsible for ensuring that academic programmes of study are consistent with the Strategic Plan and delivered in accordance with University regulations and procedures. At executive level, operational responsibility for quality rests with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

1.9 The University's academic and regulatory frameworks are set out in the AQH and its supporting appendices. Together these frameworks enable the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.10 At the time of the review the University had commissioned a project to consider the factors contributing to the percentage of 'good' honours awards it was awarding to students which it had noted as being significantly below that for Wales and the UK as a whole with variation between the faculties. The University had approached an external consultant to undertake this work and a project brief was in preparation.

1.11 The team reviewed the regulations for taught and research programmes and the minutes of committee meetings at institutional and faculty level. The team also met a range of academic and support staff.

1.12 Since the merger in 2012, the University has strived to develop and implement a consistent academic and quality assurance framework and discussion with staff in the University and in a partner institution demonstrated the key role of the AQH in setting out a common framework and providing an important reference point for all staff. The comprehensive AQH contains the University's academic regulations including rules relating to assessment and marking; the award of credit, including credit based on prior learning; degree classification; and the conduct of examining boards. The Code of Practice for Research Degrees and the Research Supervisor Handbook sets out additional information in relation to postgraduate research degrees and students are provided with useful student guides to the regulations summarising the key parts of the AQH in a student friendly manner.

1.13 The AQH is reviewed and updated annually and is referenced against the Quality Code. Although the review team saw evidence of this annual updating it noted that the 2014-15 AQH makes reference to a previous version of Chapter A of the Quality Code.

1.14 The AQH also includes details of the University's academic committee structure, introduced post merger in October 2012 and further refined for 2013-14 and 2014-15. The Academic Policy Committee, responsible for driving the development of the University's

academic portfolio and associated academic policies was introduced in 2014-15. The University reviews the terms of reference of its committees annually as part of the review of its Academic Quality Handbook. The minutes of Senate and its key standing committees demonstrated that they were generally operating effectively and in accordance with their stated terms of reference.

1.15 The team concludes that the University has in place an accessible and comprehensive academic framework and regulations, which govern the award of credit and qualifications. Post-merger it is continuing to embed this framework and review and update it where necessary and has worked hard to achieve a consistent approach across the new University. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.16 The University maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification through its definitive programme documents (DPDs). These are produced on a common University template and approved through the validation process. The template makes reference to relevant sections of the Quality Code and is designed to ensure that all required information relating to credits and learning outcomes, is provided. The template also requires programme developers to provide a description of the teaching and learning strategy for the programme, and details of the assessment methods to be used. Specifications for individual modules are included within the DPDs; a separate template is available for module specifications. This approach allows Expectation A2.1 to be met in theory.

1.17 The review team analysed the University approach to definitive programme records by reviewing a number of these programme records and validation documentation. The team also met academic and support staff.

1.18 Prior to the 2012 merger, each institution had separate arrangements for producing definitive programme records and storing programme documents. Following the merger the current template was introduced across the new University and a decision was made that the DPD would constitute the definitive record of each programme. The team heard that existing documents are being rewritten to adhere to the template at the point of revalidation. Definitive programme documents are held by the Academic Office and are being made available to staff and students via the University's MyDay portal; the focus is on publication of information for programmes of study approved from the academic year 2013-14 onwards. Information concerning programmes is captured for students through programme of study handbooks to a standard template; students confirmed these to be useful and accurate.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.20 The principles and procedures established and used by the University for the development, approval and validation of taught and research degree programmes were relatively new at the time of the review, having been introduced from the start of the academic year 2013-14 following a review and recommendations by AQSC. The validation processes had been further developed after an evaluation of their operation during 2013-14 and the current methods are set out in detail in the AQH and in guidance provided by the Academic Office. The main reasons for these changes and the relative newness of the approval and validation procedures were the institutional amalgamations that took place in 2010 (UoW Lampeter and TUC) and 2012 (TSD and SMU). UWTSD inherited programmes and different approval procedures from all its constituent parts and, particularly since 2012, considerable effort had been put into developing a single set of arrangements and in carrying out a substantial validation schedule.

1.21 The procedures established by the University for the approval and validation of its programmes, both delivered directly and by its partners, require alignment with UK academic threshold standards, including the CQFW, the FHEQ and the requirements of relevant statutory and regulatory bodies, reference to Subject Benchmark Statements, and the guidance of the Quality Code. The procedures provide for the use of external experts during programme development and validation as well as consultation with students. Together these policies and procedures mean that in principle the University complies with the guidance on programme approval set out in the Quality Code, *Chapter A3*.

1.22 The review team read the University's regulations and guidance describing and supporting the processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees. The team also examined minutes of validation and other responsible committees and spoke to both internal and expert external staff who had designed or carried out the processes of approval and validation.

1.23 The University distinguishes the processes of programme approval and programme validation. Programme approval is a 'business decision' taken by the Senior Management Team (SMT) on behalf of Senate and which addresses consistency with University plans, financial viability and resourcing. Programme validation is a two stage process overseen by AQSC and undertaken by its Validation Sub-Committee (VSC). The first stage involves the detailed development of a new programme by a programme team within a relevant faculty. External advisers are used during this stage and guidance requires a consideration of the learning outcomes of the programme and articulation of academic thresholds in terms of the external benchmarks. The second stage involves approval of the faculty-approved documentation by VSC. In cases of internal provision, whether a validation event is held depends on the degree to which the programme includes entirely new material or draws on existing modules. Guidance is provided by Academic Office. The procedures are similarly applied to programmes provided by partner institutions except that detailed scrutiny will normally take place at a validation event held at the partner institution.

1.24 The team saw and heard evidence that the University had developed its programme approval processes with care and monitored their implementation to ensure that they addressed UK threshold standards and the University's own regulations. Chapter 4 of the AQH makes explicit the requirement to ensure alignment with external reference points. The processes are reviewed annually and changes communicated to staff. It was clear from the evidence heard in meetings that the University was succeeding in developing awareness across the University of procedures and regulations that were new to staff who had worked in the constituent institutions.

1.25 The team concludes that approval processes ensure that academic standards are appropriately set and that the Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.26 The University's processes for the assessment of taught degree awards are set out in the Academic Quality Handbook (AQH) in chapters 6, 7 and 8. Learning outcomes are articulated in DPDs, which also include curriculum maps which map learning outcomes at module level to the overall programme. Learning outcomes are also articulated in programme handbooks and in module guides. Scrutiny of the validation pro formas confirms that there is a commentary in reviewing learning outcomes that is robust. The programme handbooks include the CQFW descriptors and make reference to the NQF. The AQH also references external benchmarks such as the Quality Code, Subject Benchmark Statements, the FHEQ, and CQFW.

1.27 The University operates a two stage validation process (see paragraph 1.23). Procedures for dealing with reasonable adjustments are set out in the AQH Chapter 13. These were introduced in 2012-13 and initially caused some confusion for staff who had been used to a more informal approach both for agreeing reasonable adjustments and making allowances for extenuating circumstances. The University noted that they still encounter instances of this and the review team affirms steps being taken to address this (see Expectation B6). However, staff the team met were appropriately informed of this process.

1.28 External examiner reports confirm that the learning outcomes and levels of academic achievement attained by students are consistent with those at similar institutions.

1.29 The University reviews the AQH on an annual basis and the programme development guidelines had been enhanced this academic year. The processes by which learning outcomes and assessment are approved therefore align to Chapter A, Expectation A3.2 in theory.

1.30 The review team tested the University's approach to the awarding of credit and qualifications by analysing key documentation such as the AQH, DPDs, validation documentation, module guides, programme handbooks and the reports of external examiners. Other advisory documentation for staff including programme development guidelines and the Assessment Equivalence Guidelines were also reviewed. In addition the review team also met staff and students.

1.31 The review team considered the process of awarding credit and qualifications on the basis of successfully achieving learning outcomes to work well in practice. There is a robust process for internal and external scrutiny via the validation mechanism and learning outcomes and assessment requirements are appropriately articulated in programme and module information provided to students as a consequence of programme approval.

1.32 The University has processes in place to ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded on the basis of successfully achieved programme learning outcomes and that these meet the standards set out in the Quality Code and the University's Academic Quality Handbook. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.33 The University regularly addresses and assesses whether its programmes are achieving and sustaining its own and UK threshold standards through the mechanisms of Annual Programme Review (APR) and Major Review and Revalidation every five years. These processes are applied to all programmes including research degrees and programmes delivered by partner institutions. The purpose of APR is defined as 'to enable programme teams, schools and faculties to reflect upon the effectiveness of provision over the year as a whole, and to enable the University to assure itself that quality and standards are being maintained'. The achievement of standards is principally evaluated in APR through the consideration of external examiners' reports and confirmation that any concerns raised by them have been addressed. The Major Review process explicitly considers the achievement of standards.

1.34 The University has in place procedures to address explicitly and to monitor alignment with threshold standards, together with arrangements for the systematic review of these judgements and therefore complies in principle with the guidance on securing academic standards contained within the Quality Code.

1.35 The review team read a selection of documents, analyses of progression data and minutes demonstrating the operation of APR and Major Review and consideration of their outcomes by AQSC and VSC. The team met staff and students who had participated in these processes.

1.36 Documentation describing and reporting APR showed that external examiners had confirmed that UK threshold academic standards had been appropriately set and achieved. The collaborative provision external examiner overview report for 2013-14 indicated that some externals' reports were not available at the time of writing and the other external examiners had not referred explicitly to provision at partners or had raised concerns about the consistency of the processes of marking and moderation. At meetings with University managers, the review team was told that these matters had been resolved and the achievement of standards confirmed. The review team recommends that the University strengthen the management and oversight of external examining in collaborative provision (see Expectations B7 and B10). The documentation reporting the outcomes of Major Reviews showed that UK and institutional academic threshold standards had been monitored and maintained.

1.37 The review team confirms that the Expectation is met and the associated risk level is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.38 The University uses external and independent expertise at key stages of the processes for setting and maintaining academic standards, namely programme approval, validation, monitoring and review; and through use of external examiners. The University also operates a School Audit process which includes two external advisers. The regulations for these activities are articulated in the AQH.

1.39 Both stages of the validation process require the expertise of an external. At stage 1 a written report must be received from two external advisers, who may then attend the validation event. Examples reviewed by the review team confirm that comments are received about a range of issues including learning outcomes; title and level of the programme; the balance of academic and practical elements and curriculum breadth and depth; and the assessment strategy. At stage 2 the Validation Sub-Committee (VSC) membership also stipulates two external members who carry responsibilities relating to quality and standards at other UK universities. The review team met one of the externals who confirmed the nature of the role and concurred that it was of benefit to the process. One of the responsibilities of external advisers is to ensure that the documentation meets the requirements set out in the AQH. There are occasions where the VSC requires a validation event to be held, for example where programmes are to be delivered by collaborative partner institutions, that have not entered into a structural partnership with the University. In those circumstances the University also requires two external members with expertise in the subject area under consideration.

1.40 Where there are no substantial changes in Major Review and Revalidation, the review is carried out as an extended annual review process. Commentary must be provided on external examiner reports as part of this process. The University has only had one such exercise to date. Where substantial changes are proposed the process for involving external expertise is the same as that for programme validation.

1.41 Confirmation of maintenance of academic standards on a routine basis is carried out by external examiners. The External Examiner Nomination Panel considers all nominations and makes recommendations to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. The University holds several induction events each year during which external examiners are advised of their duties and the University's regulations; and introduced to the programme team. External examiners are required to write a report confirming whether the standards set are appropriate for the level of qualification and responses to the report are considered during the annual programme review. Overview reports for on-campus and off-campus provision are prepared for AQSC and Collaborative Partnership Committee (CPC) respectively and reported upwards to the Senate.

1.42 The arrangements in place for using external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards are comprehensive and robust. Consequently the review team concludes that the Expectation is met in theory.

1.43 The review team explored the effectiveness of the University's processes for engaging external expertise through the review of documentation, including the AQH, validation documentation, VSC minutes, major review reports, school audit reports and the process of appointing, and reports of, external examiners. In addition, the review team met staff from across the campuses and at one of the partners which included one of the external representatives from the VSC.

1.44 The arrangements for using externality in programme development, validation and review are robust. Staff the review team met during the visit confirmed that the processes and regulations in relation to these mechanisms are well known and the AQH was viewed as a fundamental document for their work.

1.45 The review team considers that the University has comprehensive and well evidenced processes that confirm independent external expertise in the setting and maintaining of academic standards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.46 In reaching its judgement about the setting and maintenance of academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement were met and the associated levels of risk were low. The review team notes the key role of the Academic Quality Handbook as a comprehensive and common reference point particularly in the context of the merged institution. Overall, the review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the University **meet** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The University's approach to the design, development and initial approval and validation of all taught programmes, including the taught element of research degree programmes, is specified in the Academic Quality Handbook (AQH).

2.2 The review team tested the approach by reviewing the AQH, approval documentation, DPDs, committee minutes and information available online. In addition, the review team met a range of staff and student representatives who had experience of the process in operation.

2.3 Following the merger, a new process was introduced across the University, based on a Stage 1 validation process at faculty level under arrangements approved by AQSC, followed by a 'second stage' led by VSC.

2.4 The first stage includes consultation with a range of stakeholders, including students and University officers, together with consideration of the comments of at least two external advisers approved by the Chair of AQSC. At the second stage, the proposal is presented to a meeting of VSC, at which several such proposals may be considered. VSC checks that the first stage process has been completed satisfactorily and makes recommendations to AQSC in respect of the validation of the programme.

2.5 The University's existing guidance on programme design has been updated recently to reflect changes in the Quality Code and consultation with other Welsh institutions.

2.6 The approach makes a distinction between programme approval, which is a business decision made by the SMT and programme validation, which is an academic activity overseen by AQSC on behalf of the Senate and undertaken by VSC.

2.7 Programme validation cannot take place until SMT approval has been given; programme delivery cannot commence without validation through AQSC.

2.8 The activities of programme approval and validation are supported by a series of templates which are designed to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to all key areas and which shows how a proposed new programme is compatible with the University's strategic priorities, will meet market demand and includes an analysis of the resource requirements.

2.9 The template for draft DPDs requires the presentation of a wide range of information, including summaries of the ways in which students and, where applicable, employers have been involved in the programme's development, and its significance in the context of the University's overall academic portfolio. Students are consulted about new programme developments at Faculty Board. The validation process has been strengthened by a commentary in the Dean's report clearly indicating how students have been consulted on the proposal. This report then goes to VSC. Students are invited to attend validation

events. The minutes of VSC showed that no students had attended the committee although the team were provided with evidence that a student had attended one collaborative partner validation event.

2.10 Information is required about the programme's structure and organisation, delivery pattern, and learning, teaching and assessment strategies and explicit reference must be made to the Quality Code and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

2.11 Following completion of the validation process, the DPD becomes the definitive record of the programme and is held in and maintained by the Academic Office.

2.12 The validation process requires the appropriate use of external reference points when developing proposals for new programmes. Relevant reference points, in addition to the Quality Code, include the core content of Pearson Higher National awards and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements. Adherence is checked through the validation process.

2.13 The validation of new programmes includes a requirement for written reports from two individuals external to the University, who may also be invited to attend validation events, together with the input of individuals from other faculties/University departments.

2.14 Nominations for the external advisers require approval by the chair of AQSC, who is responsible for checking that the two individuals, considered as a team, have the appropriate expertise, are sufficiently 'external', and have no obvious conflicts of interest.

2.15 The comments of external advisers and University officers are submitted on templates designed to ensure that appropriate reference is made to the range of matters considered at validation. Where appropriate, input is also sought from PSRBs and employers, and additional externality is provided through the contributions of the two external members of VSC.

2.16 The new arrangements were reviewed by VSC and AQSC towards the end of 2013-14 and the consensus was that they were robust and generally working well. A validation event continues to be required for programmes offered through collaborative partner institutions that have not entered into a structural partnership with the University.

2.17 The University recognises that staff knowledge and expertise are central to ensuring that programmes are designed and developed effectively, and are subject to a transparent and rigorous process of approval. Staff are briefed annually on key quality updates at Staff Development Week and Partner Development Days.

2.18 Overall, the review team considers that the University operates sound processes for the design, development and approval of programmes, which appropriately discharge responsibilities for enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.19 The University has a Student Admissions Policy which articulates its approach to recruitment, selection and admission to taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. General entry criteria are detailed in the Academic Quality Handbook. Arrangements for admission to research degrees are outlined in the Code of Practice for Research Degrees. Separate arrangements exist for admissions to programmes delivered with collaborative partners.

2.20 A review of admissions policies was executed following the merger and a single Student Admissions Policy was approved by Senate who hold responsibility for reviewing the policy on an annual basis. Since 2014 Senate has devolved this responsibility to Academic Policy Committee and Research Degrees Committee. International student recruitment is also considered at the International Committee.

2.21 With regard to taught programmes, academic staff are appointed by Heads of School to act as admissions tutors. Registry are responsible for the admissions process across the University and support these tutors with training and guidance. Applications are considered in line with the Admissions Policy and decisions are recorded and outcome letters sent to applicants. The Policy and Procedure for Admissions Feedback, Appeals and Complaints is designed to ensure tutors apply a consistent approach and affords applicants clear information about how to proceed should they wish to challenge a decision.

2.22 An Undergraduate Admissions Tutors Forum has been formed. This acts as the University's steering group for ensuring the highest standards of engagement between the University and its enquirers and applicants for programmes of study. Part of the Forum's remit centres around facilitating the sharing of best practice and the group have informed the selection of topics for training and development.

2.23 Admissions for programmes delivered with collaborative partners are the responsibility of the collaborative partner. These arrangements are considered during the partnership approval process, with programme-specific entry requirements discussed at validation, and are required to align with the University's Student Admissions Policy. Partnership Team Leaders are required to monitor adherence to these arrangements. Students are placed onto the University's student records system and this automatically generates a welcome email which details the students' entitlements.

2.24 All applications for research degrees are considered by a subcommittee of Research Degrees Committee to ensure consistency. Faculties ensure that two staff scrutinise all applications before submitting them to the subcommittee for consideration. Admissions are analysed as part of the annual report considered by Research Degrees Committee.

2.25 The clear policy framework, considered approach to admissions following the merger, guidance for staff involved in the process and student satisfaction with their

admissions experience, coupled with processes to challenge decisions, are sufficient to enable this Expectation to be met in theory.

2.26 The team tested this Expectation by meeting staff, undergraduate students and students on research programmes. The team also scrutinised the Student Admissions Policy and Code of Practice for Research Degrees. In addition, the team viewed guidance for admissions tutors, policies and procedures relating to the handling of feedback, appeals and complaints as they relate to admissions, letter templates and the minutes of University committees.

2.27 The team found that the University's policies are clearly and comprehensively documented in the Academic Quality Handbook and are aligned to the Quality Code and take appropriate external reference points into consideration. Staff are knowledgeable about the University's admissions policies and procedures, including staff at partner colleges and those handling postgraduate admissions.

2.28 Students are positive about the extent to which their dialogue with staff during the application stage enables them to make an informed decision and provides them with detailed information about their programme of study. Undergraduate students informed the team that entry criteria were clear and that staff were responsive to queries during the application stage. Postgraduate students also reported that information was clearly communicated during the admissions process.

2.29 A varied programme of staff development opportunities are in place around admissions. This includes sessions on changes to the UCAS Tariff point system, Qualifications Review in Wales, The Equality Act 2010 and reasonable adjustments. The review team found that while admissions criteria are agreed at validation and included as part of briefing sessions to collaborative partners, no explicit training was provided for staff responsible for admissions in partner institutions. However the close liaison between Partnership Team Leaders and staff at collaborative partners ensures that they have a sound understanding of their responsibilities.

2.30 The team concludes that the University's detailed and comprehensive procedures which are adhered to by staff, combined with their comprehensive training programme, close partnership links and accessible information for students ensure that the Expectation is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.31 The University's approach to learning and teaching is overseen by Senate's Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee (LTEC). LTEC's primary responsibility is the development, implementation and monitoring of the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy (LTES). Other aspects of LTEC's remit relate to activities that underpin the successful delivery of the LTES, including staff development and mechanisms for enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. To support this work, LTEC has provision for three student members, one from each main campus location. Research Degrees Committee (RDC) oversees the equivalent arrangements for research degrees.

2.32 The review team explored the approach through the analysis of documentation including key strategies, minutes of committees, survey responses and information available to students through the website. The team also met students, and academic and support staff from across the provision, including those in partner institutions.

2.33 The strategy sets out the University's approach to learning and teaching themes that cross subject boundaries, including an annual institutional Enhancement Theme and the strategies for embedding activities that are linked explicitly to the University's strategic priorities, including sustainability and employability. A revised LTES was approved by Senate in March 2015 with more explicit reference to scholarship relating to learning and teaching.

2.34 The University's learning and teaching activities, and associated assessment practices, are designed to enable students to achieve the learning outcomes of their chosen programmes of study. The validation and review processes provide a means for ensuring that the teaching, learning and assessment strategy for the programme is appropriate, and that due consideration is given to the provision of an inclusive learning environment.

2.35 The University recognises that effective teaching and learning is dependent on the expertise, enthusiasm and experience of its staff. New staff handbooks are currently in preparation but at the time of the review were not available. Staff policies are available on the portal.

2.36 The University's approach to staff recruitment and selection is governed by the Recruitment and Selection Policy and Code of Practice. Job descriptions set out clearly the qualifications and skills required for individual roles; those for Lecturers and Senior Lecturers include a standard specification of duties relating to teaching, research and/or scholarship which make clear the expectation that staff will engage in reflective practice and continuing professional updating.

2.37 All new staff are now required to complete the University's HEA-accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education if they do not already hold a formal teaching qualification. The University recognises that further work is required to ensure that this expectation is implemented and tracked consistently across the institution. Following appointment, new staff are introduced to the University in accordance with the Induction

Policy and are allocated a mentor, and all academic staff are encouraged to undertake study at Doctoral level.

2.38 Following completion of the probationary period, formal opportunities for reflection on performance and identification of development needs are provided through the annual appraisal process. A new Appraisal Policy was introduced in 2015 but at the time of the review it was too early to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the new process. The review team learnt that from the next academic year the University will introduce academic staff activity profiles. This is to ensure an equitable planned workload between academic staff across the University.

2.39 The University has a range of mechanisms for ensuring that learning and teaching practices are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship. All faculties are required to establish arrangements for the peer observation of teaching. The University's approach to peer observation is based on non-judgemental practice and providing support for personal professional development; the process is separate from performance review procedures such as probation and appraisal. Through LTEC, the University has nonetheless recognised the need to strengthen its oversight of peer observation arrangements across the institution and to ensure that an agreed process is consistently followed and documented.

2.40 Activities relating specifically to delivery and supervision of research degree programmes, including arrangements for the selection and training of Directors of Studies and research degree supervisors, and evaluations of effectiveness, are overseen by RDC.

2.41 The University is committed to supporting the continuing professional development of its staff. Leadership on staff development is provided through the Staff Development Committee (SDC). A wide range of activities is organised throughout the year under the aegis of SDC, commencing with the University-wide Strategic and Operational Planning programme each September. There are annual institution-wide Learning and Teaching days, supplemented by campus-based 'Lunch 'n' Learn' events. The focus of these events is on teaching and pedagogy. There are, in addition, events relating to Future Directions enhancement themes. The opportunities provided through SDC are complemented by a range of activities designed to specifically support professional development relating to teaching, organised primarily through the Enhancement Unit. (See also Expectation Enhancement).

2.42 Development needs are formally identified at appointment and through subsequent appraisals. Departmental budgets include an allocation for staff development and there are also opportunities to bid for additional funding allocated by SDC itself. SDC is taking steps to strengthen its analysis of the effectiveness of staff development arrangements, and faculties and professional services have been advised that annual receipt of updated staff development plans, linked to the Strategic Plan and including analysis of impact, will be a condition of future funding.

2.43 The University currently offers eight accredited routes towards HEA Fellowship, ranging from individual application to several certificate programmes. All routes are aligned with the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). Only 19 per cent of staff are HEA Fellows. Steps are, however, being taken to improve the percentage of staff who are Fellows. The revised LTES includes plans for establishment of communities of scholars around three research/scholarship themes linked to teaching: enterprise and employability, education for sustainable development; and research/teaching linkages.

2.44 At local level, faculties are responsible for overseeing the physical learning environment provided for their students. A wide range of teaching and learning resources

are made available to students through the virtual learning environment (VLE) which is maintained by the Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Department.

2.45 Taken together with the arrangements in place to monitor students' academic personal and professional potential, the comprehensive range of academic and pastoral support provided for all students is **good practice**. (See Expectation B4 and also Expectation B11).

2.46 The University evaluates its strategic approach to, and effectiveness of, learning and teaching using information provided through a range of mechanisms, including the APR process, internal and external surveys of student opinion and other sources of student feedback, as well as overview reports on matters such as student complaints and appeals. This information provides evidence of the general effectiveness of the University's approach to ensuring that students are provided with a high quality learning experience and of the significant progress made since the merger.

2.47 Overall, the review team considers that the basis for effective learning and teaching is expressed clearly to staff and students through a range of policies, strategies and procedural information. The learning environment and resources are sufficient. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.48 A range of strategies are in place to support the delivery of the University's Strategic Plan including the Learning Teaching and Enhancement Strategy, the Welsh Medium and Bilingual Education Strategy and a Student Retention Strategy. Oversight of their implementation rests with Senate, although in practice monitoring takes place through the relevant Senate standing committees and their subcommittees.

2.49 The review team explored the approach through the analysis of the relevant strategies, policies and procedures, projects and information available online. The team also met a range of students from all academic levels and a range of delivery locations, and discussed the approach with academic and support staff.

2.50 The Student Affairs Committee is central in ensuring high quality support services are available for students and is responsible for ensuring the provision of high quality support services for students across the University, including the development of relevant policies and procedures, and for matters such as learning support and provision for disabled students.

2.51 Validation provides another vehicle for ensuring that appropriate support mechanisms are in place from the commencement of a programme. The validation process is designed to establish the mechanisms that will be in place to enable students to develop their potential with monitoring and review providing a means of checking whether or not the intentions have been achieved.

2.52 For 2014-15 these processes have been supplemented through the introduction of school audits. School audits provide an additional means of enabling the University to take an overview of the quality and standards of the academic provision and the quality of the student experience offered by a school as a whole. The review team learnt that it plans to implement a similar process of audit for professional services departments in 2015-16. All of the processes will include opportunities for student engagement and feedback.

2.53 New students are supported by programme of study handbooks, library and learning resources presentations, and literacy skills sessions. The University has taken account of the visa restrictions placed upon international students and created a dedicated skills development programme for students at its London campus, for whom opportunities to undertake work placements are restricted by visa requirements.

2.54 The Student Charter draws students' attention to the enhanced learning opportunities provided in a range of areas, including employability, student mobility and Welsh medium education, together with the opportunities for gaining additional experience through activities organised through the Students' Union.

2.55 The support services work closely with the faculties and academic schools to ensure a common understanding of respective responsibilities for supporting students, and developments in policy are communicated, as appropriate, by email or through the annual Strategic and Operational Planning programme.

2.56 A range of mechanisms are in place to inform students before and during their time at the University of opportunities designed to enable their development and achievement, and to support their transition to, and through, life at the University.

2.57 Support and learning opportunities available to students are communicated through induction, various handbooks produced centrally and at programme level, and the webpages of individual professional services.

2.58 The provision of inclusive education is an integral part of the University's mission. Within this overall strategic context, examples of specific commitments include the support provided for disabled students in a range of areas and arrangements for carers. The team was informed that the mapping of student services across campuses had occurred to ensure that a range of services was available at all campuses.

2.59 For taught awards, pre-arrival information is provided primarily through the website and through University and faculty-specific prospectuses, with open days and interview days giving applicants the opportunity for more detailed discussion with tutors and relevant support staff. There are also 'Taster' days designed primarily for local school pupils in support of the University's commitment to widening access. More informal information is provided by the University's team of Student Ambassadors who use social media to alert prospective students to activities and developments that may be of interest to them, and to keep in contact generally until the point of arrival.

2.60 Specific arrangements are in place for disabled applicants and, as far as possible, their support needs are ascertained prior to acceptance of a place. During enrolment and induction, pre-arrival information is consolidated through the provision of other written materials including programme of study handbooks, and through, for example, tours of library and learning resources and presentations on information and digital literacy skills delivered by subject librarians.

2.61 The support arrangements provided for existing students across the University include generic study skills support, the appointment of support liaison tutors to provide a bridge between the academic schools and student services in respect of welfare matters and the ongoing support provided by subject librarians.

2.62 An analysis of the University's current approach to supporting students to progress successfully through their programmes of study, benchmarked against examples of existing good practice internally and elsewhere in the sector, is provided in the Student Retention Strategy.

2.63 The University places particular emphasis on skills development, encompassing both academic and employability skills. Academic skills are developed through a range of mechanisms including study skills support for distance learners and specialist learning support for disabled students, information and digital literacy skills development, and personal development planning. Distance learning students studying via the Lampeter campus are supported by a dedicated Outreach Services Librarian who offers information and digital literacy support using a variety of digital and electronic communication methods, as well as at inductions and the annual graduate summer school. The Library and Learning Resources department (LLR) prioritises the purchase of electronic resources over print resources wherever possible to allow equitable access to all students.

2.64 Many programmes include opportunities for placements or other forms of work-based learning and an increasing emphasis is placed on the development of enterprise and employability skills. There are also volunteering opportunities available through LLR and the Students' Union.

2.65 At programme level, there is a range of mechanisms to support the development of students' skills in enterprise and entrepreneurship; examples include the use of live projects in the Faculty of Art and Design, which enable students to work with external companies to find solutions to real issues, and an Enterprise Week.

2.66 The Careers Service includes professionally qualified careers advisers on all the main campus locations, and facilitates the University's participation in the usual range of graduate recruitment activities, in addition to providing advice and support for individual students both before and after graduation. The University has also participated in the national GO Wales programme. Through the Careers Service, students are made aware of global citizenship but at the student meeting, students had limited awareness of the initiative. There is a dedicated careers adviser on the London campus.

2.67 All students have entitlement to a personal academic/year tutor. All personal tutors are provided with a handbook which clearly sets out the role and expectations of a personal tutor.

2.68 Programmes offered through the Wales Institute for Work-based Learning are wholly focused on the accreditation of work-based learning and supporting students towards achieving an academic qualification through a Professional Practice Framework, an area in which the University is recognised to have particular expertise.

2.69 As a way of promoting both extracurricular and co-curricular skills development, following the merger, the University introduced the Life Design initiative, coordinated by a new Student Experience Department. Life Design, which was developed in consultation with the Students' Union, was introduced to staff through a number of events in December 2014 and was launched at the end of January 2015; work is in progress to ensure that staff and students are aware of its purpose and the opportunities that it offers. Roll-out of the Life Design initiative has continued and it will become the next University enhancement theme. As the initiative is relatively new it is too early to fully evaluate.

2.70 Taking into account the provision outlined above, together with the measures taken by the University to enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices (see Expectation B3), the review team regards the comprehensive range of academic and pastoral support provided for all students as good practice. (See also Expectation B11.)

2.71 The self-evaluation document, submitted to QAA as part of this review, recognised that, following the merger, there was evidence of underinvestment in resources particularly at the Swansea campus and some students commented negatively on the availability of resources in some subject areas. Significant underinvestment had resulted in low levels of student satisfaction and meant that some resources were no longer fit for purpose. The team found evidence that significant investment had now been made and students reported that resources had improved. The team also found evidence that the University has a strategic approach to identifying resource priorities and allocating associated budgets. Despite this, the team was informed by students that student feedback over resource deficiencies had not always been acted upon and that where investment is not possible this had not always been communicated to students. The review team affirmed action being taken to remedy this as discussed under Expectation B5.

2.72 Responsibility for ensuring that high quality services and resources are provided throughout the University rests with the Central Resources Committee (CRC). Chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Finance and Planning), CRC's membership includes the heads of the majority of the University's professional services. Consideration of resources is an explicit part of the programme approval process, and the new first stage validation process includes a requirement for consultation with relevant support departments. The continuing adequacy of resources is checked through the monitoring and review and audit. At service

level, mechanisms include the annual LLR satisfaction surveys, student focus groups organised by the ITS team, and Student Services feedback postcards.

2.73 Students have the opportunity to comment on resources through school and faculty boards, staff-student meetings and the student convention held at each campus. Resource issues are also discussed in the APR. The Pro Vice-Chancellor also meets with the Head of the Student Experience Committee on a weekly basis to discuss any issues. The CRC also picks up resource issues from students. Following the merger and the historic underinvestment in resources at Swansea, the team was assured that there is now a systematic process for the allocation of resources.

2.74 The review team considers that the University now has appropriate mechanisms for enabling student development and achievement, and that these are routinely monitored and evaluated. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.75 The University is committed to working in partnership with its students to provide a high quality learning experience. The institution's approach to student engagement is detailed in the AQH and is aligned with the Quality Code. The University identifies four main vehicles for student engagement: student membership of committees; involvement in annual programme reviews; opportunities to provide formal feedback on their learning experience; and discussing issues with staff including personal tutors.

2.76 The Students' Union holds responsibility for overseeing the University's formal system of student representation. Since the merger in 2012 the chief focus of the Students' Union has been to form a single structure, bringing the previously independent unions together under one regulatory framework; work on student engagement and formal representative structures has therefore been incremental. The University submitted a successful bid to the Higher Education Academy's Students as Partners project to support this work and while it did not fully participate in the project it played a role in seeding the current framework of representation.

2.77 A Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) was appointed in 2013 and this spurred the formation of a Student Experience Department. Part of the rationale for its establishment was to aid the Students' Union in consolidating and extending student engagement mechanisms. In order to achieve this, the department are recruiting 12 student engagement ambassadors to work on a range of key projects. They also operate a traffic light system as a means of providing clear progress updates to students and staff and work with the Students' Union to operate an interactive online platform which allows students to raise issues of concern and in turn the wider student body can determine the importance of any issues and whether action should be taken.

2.78 Student representatives are appointed through elections which take place in class and are conducted by Programme Directors; the Students' Union oversees this part of the process. It is tasked to deliver training and provide ongoing support to representatives. Students are represented on a wide range of committees at university, faculty and school level. Membership arrangements have recently been amended to allow for representation on committees which encompasses all campus locations. Faculty boards act as the primary vehicle to discuss academic issues. Staff-student committees operate at school level to discuss the quality of the student learning experience and student conventions held twice a year provide an additional formal opportunity for students to feed back on their wider learning experience. Students are also involved in programme development and review and Union representatives attend more senior university committees, especially at faculty level.

2.79 Student representatives are recognised in a variety of ways emanating from previous practice at the universities pre-merger. Representatives at faculty level are paid for their contribution and students are also able to achieve accreditation through the Professional Certificate in Employability and a Professional Certificate in Skills for Self-Employment.

2.80 The University participates in the National Student Survey, Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey and most recently the Student Barometer Survey. This is supplemented by module and programme evaluations and questionnaires for level 4 and 5 students which

simulates the National Student Survey. A Student Charter is also in place which delineates responsibilities held by the University, Students' Union and students themselves.

2.81 Student Engagement in quality assurance activities is monitored through the APR process and the University is currently working to establish a set of key performance indicators to measure the effectiveness of its work in this area.

2.82 The team found that despite challenges posed by successive mergers, a formal student representative structure exists and the University has defined student engagement in its context even if this may be subject to change at a later point in time. Although limited and implemented inconsistently, some training exists for student representatives and students are involved in a wide range of forums which discuss the student experience. The team therefore determined that the University's arrangements are sufficient to enable Expectation B5 to be met in practice.

2.83 The team tested this Expectation by meeting staff, students and student representatives. The team examined the Student Charter, organisational charts, outcomes from student conventions and strategy documents pertaining to student engagement. In addition the team also viewed job descriptions, the Student Submission, Academic Quality Handbook and the minutes of committees.

2.84 The team found that the mergers have presented challenges for the University and the Students' Union in constructing and implementing an effective system of student representation. The Union reported that University staff do not always follow the agreed process in relation to elections which can cause difficulties in terms of their oversight of the system. Student representatives also informed the team that training was basic and they were not always prepared for meetings. Despite the structural challenges posed by the system, the team met representatives who were clearly engaged at programme, school and faculty level. It was evident that their contribution was valued and that they were able to take part in informed discussions about their learning opportunities and outcomes from quality assurance processes, such as annual programme monitoring. The Students' Union highlighted to the team that the establishment of the Student Experience Department has strengthened student engagement within the University and illustrates the institution's commitment to a strong and vibrant representative system. The review team therefore **affirms** the work of the Student Experience Department to support the Students' Union to strengthen oversight of the student representative system, and their training.

2.85 The partnership between the Student Experience Department and the Students' Union has led to increasing use of an interactive electronic platform to gather and prioritise student feedback. All students, including postgraduate students and those studying at the London Campus, are able to submit feedback electronically and students then 'vote' for an issue to help ascertain its importance. Students reported that they really valued this platform as an accessible and simple way to submit feedback. The team therefore considers the use of an interactive online system to gather and act on student feedback to be **good practice**.

2.86 The review team considered the role of students and student representatives in programme development and approval, (see Expectation B1) to be under developed. While the team found evidence that students are consulted over potential new programmes and attend second stage validation events as panel members this involvement was not applied consistently. In some instances student involvement focuses more on ascertaining market demand than consulting students over the curriculum. Students are involved in the consideration of programmes through their membership of the Validation Sub-Committee, however student representatives have not attended meetings for the past two academic years.

2.87 The University recognised that, following the merger, various mechanisms existed to capture feedback from students and to 'close the loop' in respect of any action taken. Students informed the team that these mechanisms were not always effective and, while action had been taken to strengthen some processes and systems recently, changes such as those to the extenuating circumstances procedure had not been communicated well. Students also commented that where action was not possible, for instance due to funding restrictions, the University could strengthen communication over inaction. The University has taken steps to address this by convening annual student conventions which provide an additional, formal opportunity for students to discuss their wider learning experience and this informs a traffic light system of feedback as a means of providing clear progress updates to students and staff. The review team therefore **affirms** the University's work to inform students about action taken in response to their feedback.

2.88 The team concludes that, while the elections process and training for representatives could be strengthened, and involvement in programme development and approval could be applied more consistently, the University is taking action to address minor shortcomings in student engagement systems. A productive relationship exists between the University and the Students' Union and innovative mechanisms are in place to capture student feedback, assess the importance of issues to students and to communicate any action taken as a result. For these reasons the team determined that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.89 The University has mechanisms in place to ensure that the design, approval and review of assessment enables students to demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes of their programmes. Assessment regulations form part of the Academic Quality Handbook (AQH) which is reviewed on an annual basis and amendments are approved by AQSC and Senate. In March 2014, for example, a working group was established to revise Chapter 7 of the AQH. In addition to regulations other forms of guidance are provided to staff. Programme developers are advised to use the (recently updated) guidance available from the Enhancement Unit on programme design and assessment, and consult the Assessment Equivalence Guidelines.

2.90 The University assures itself that academic staff are prepared to undertake the assessment of student work through the PgCert in Teaching in Higher Education which contains units on assessment theory and practice. In the evaluation of the strategic approach to enhancement it is noted that a set of 'Lunch 'n' Learn' sessions on 'Making the most of assessment' were carried out, in which the Dean of Learning, Teaching and Enhancement visited all the University's campuses in succession, introducing to staff proposals on assessment design as part of the run-up to the Learning and Teaching Conference on 'Innovative Assessment/Creative Feedback'.

2.91 Staff are updated on changes at the annual Strategic and Operational Planning programme which the team was advised was normally attended by all staff. If staff are not able to attend, email correspondence is sent which includes copies of presentations and documentation. Staff are also updated at partner days and at faculty meetings.

2.92 The AQH notes that the APR process is an opportunity to consider the appropriateness of assessment. The APR reports have sections on amendments to programmes which include assessment changes or comment in other ways on assessment.

2.93 Assessment strategies are outlined in definitive programme documents (DPDs). Programme handbooks provide links to the relevant sections of the AQH, outline students' responsibilities in relation to assessment and include module descriptors, which set out assessment requirements. Module guides also set out assessment requirements and also include hand-in dates and the dates by which students can expect to receive feedback. Definitive programme documents stipulate that students will be provided with details of the assessment programme for the year at the start of the academic year along with dates and specifications of coursework. Students confirmed that this does happen.

2.94 The University operates a Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL), a description of which is provided in the AQH (Chapter 10). There are two facets; certified learning and experiential learning. For those seeking exemption of up to 40 credits of experiential learning, this is approved by the RPEL Board. The AQH also references a Recognition and Accreditation of Learning Handbook. This is a comprehensive handbook taking students through the process of making a claim for experiential learning of over 40 credits. Minutes of the RPEL Board indicate that the process works appropriately and in the

December 2014 meeting suggestions were made for a proposal to AQSC and Senate about simplifying the process. The University has a process for managing requests from students to be assessed in a language other than the language of delivery.

2.95 The University defines and operates consistent processes for internal and external moderation, which is confirmed in the reports of external examiners. Faculty Boards can determine the most appropriate marking and moderation processes within the context of the marking framework adopted by the University. The AQH provides guidelines on this in Appendix GA22. During the visit, staff from the University and its partner institutions confirmed that they knew what the requirements were for their schools and faculties. A review of the policy set out in the module guides and the evidence provided on moderation confirmed that this is occurring in accordance with the regulations.

2.96 The review team explored the University's processes for assessment, including the recognition of prior learning, through the review of documentation, including the AQH; programme design and assessment equivalence guidelines; RPEL Board; AQSC and Senate minutes; definitive programme documents; module guides, VLE; moderation practices; RPL Handbook examining board minutes; and external examiner reports. In addition the review team met staff and students from across the campuses and at partner institutions.

2.97 The AQH stipulates that students must be provided with descriptors of expected standards of student achievement and with what is expected for the award of a particular grade or classification. Two module guides were provided in the evidence base. They both contain a copy of the module feedback form which has an assessment grid. However, only one lists what is required to reach each classification band and shows how the marks are awarded. During the visit a further assignment specification was provided which was comprehensive. Staff confirmed that students are all provided with marking criteria for each assessment even though it is adjusted for subject areas, however the review team concluded from its meetings with students that this was not consistent across all provision with some students noting that they did not receive criteria at all. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University adopt a consistent approach to ensuring that all students are provided with clear grading criteria which enable them to understand what is required to achieve a particular grade.

2.98 The AQH stipulates a 20 term-time working day feedback deadline for undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, extending to 30 days for taught postgraduate dissertations. It also makes clear that formal written assessment feedback reports must be prepared for every piece of assessed work that contributes to the formal assessment of a student's performance. While staff confirmed their understanding of these deadlines and reinforced the requirement for written feedback, the review team concludes from meetings with students that there are concerns that the quality of feedback is variable, that it is not always clear what is expected and that it did not always give guidance on how to improve, or relate clearly to criteria. In some cases students had not received written feedback at all. Consequently the review team **recommends** that the University ensure that assessment feedback is provided in line with University requirements.

2.99 The University operates a two-tier structure for formal examining boards, comprising the Initial Examining Board (IEB) and the Progression/Award Examining Board (PAEB). The IEB itself can be structured in two parts, at the discretion of the faculty. Either a single stage; the Programme Examining Board (PEB), or a dual stage; Module Examining Board (MEB) followed by a PEB. In 2014-15 the University extended Mid-session Examination Boards to all campuses and allowed the Boards to make retrieval decisions.

2.100 The AQH and the presentation made to external examiners during their induction specifies that the membership for mid-sessional boards is the same as other boards. However, in the evidence provided there is an inconsistent presence of the external examiner, who was present at one but not the other two. Staff confirmed that publishing the dates of the boards slightly later than anticipated had resulted in problems of availability from some external examiners and as a result the University had to put more onus on the spirit of the regulations in this first year of operation of the Mid-Sessional Examining Boards across the University. The AQH does not stipulate if there is a quoracy requirement and what arrangements are in place should the membership of the Board not be quorate.

2.101 The review team notes that changes have been made to standardise the arrangements for, and the reporting of, Boards of Examiners across the merged institution and welcomed measures which had already been taken to clarify terminology but members of the team saw examples of the new Mid-Sessional Examining Boards not always having the same membership as other boards, in particular held in the absence of an external examiner; external examiners present at some pre-Boards, contrary in both cases to the requirements laid down in the AQH and issues with the reporting system which had led to templates being used which did not accurately reflect the status and nature of the Boards.

2.102 The AQH is comprehensive and all encompassing in relation to the management of assessment. Hence while the University's quality assurance procedures are adequate there are some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied, particularly in relation to the provision of appropriate and consistent assessment criteria to students, feedback to students and the management of examination boards. Consequently the review team **recommends** that the University clarify the membership, attendance, remit and reporting requirements of each of the boards within the University's examination board structure.

2.103 The University has recently introduced new arrangements for considering student claims relating to extenuating circumstances, which had previously been dealt with by individual schools and/or programme teams in the founding institutions. In order to ensure equity of treatment, all such claims are now considered by a central Extenuating Circumstances Panel (ECP) in accordance with the regulations set out in the AQH. ECP's decisions are reported to the relevant examining board for implementation and the Board is not permitted to re-open the discussion. The University stated that there are still instances where staff appear unfamiliar with aspects of the procedure. Staff the review team met during the visit confirmed their understanding of the process and the usefulness of a centralised approach. However, students expressed concern about the lack of communication of the new process. The University advised that colleagues from the Academic Office have conducted roadshows on the campuses and updated websites and programme documentation in order to convey effectively the changes to the procedure. The review team had sight of the new guidelines on the website and confirmed the link to the website in programme documentation and therefore **affirms** the steps being taken to ensure a common understanding among staff and students of the new extenuating circumstances procedure.

2.104 Overall, the review team considers that the University operates processes which enable students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the learning outcomes. As some of the processes currently require clarification or further communication in order to address issues around variability and inconsistency in practice or to explain a change in process, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.105 Scrupulous use is made of external examiners by the University. The processes and arrangements for external examining are set out in the Academic Quality Handbook (AQH) Chapter 7, are clear and comprehensive, and external examiner reports are considered seriously at all levels of the University.

2.106 Oversight of the appointment of external examiners is managed by the External Examiner Nomination Panel and the minutes confirm that the process is robust with references to potential conflicts of interest (then resolved), the need for mentoring to be put in place for less experienced examiners and developments in procedure and process. At least one external examiner is appointed for all taught provision which leads to a higher education award and the normal period of tenure is four years. In addition, at least one external examiner must be appointed as a senior external examiner for the purposes of attending the Progression/Award Examining Board in order to ensure that the University's procedures are followed correctly. In the event that an external examiner is proposed who is not from an academic background, a team of examiners may be appointed so that all criteria are met, or an experienced examiner may be appointed to act as a mentor.

2.107 External examiners are required to attend an induction session which is run several times a year. The training materials are comprehensive and include an outline of the role along with a detailed summary of the University's regulations. They also discuss information relating to the programmes for which they have oversight. Sufficient detail is provided to enable external examiners to undertake their duties. Following induction, examiners receive an annual university briefing to update them on relevant amendments to regulations. The letter from the Dean confirms that this is carried out by correspondence. External examiners are required to approve assessment tasks and these are provided to faculty boards in the form of annual agreements.

2.108 It is the University's expectation that no external examining board will take place without the presence of at least one external examiner. As noted in the section on Expectation B6, the review team comments on the inconsistency of application of the regulations in respect of this requirement. Indeed the overview report for 2013-14 notes that 33 external examiners did not attend.

2.109 Following the examination boards, external examiners are required to complete an annual report on a standard pro forma which is returned to the Academic Office within two calendar months. The External Examiner Overview Report for 2013-14 notes the Dean of Quality and Standards scrutinises reports prior to sending them to deans, to identify any serious concerns raised in order to respond to external examiners promptly. It also notes that formal consideration of the reports is linked to APR which has a deadline of 15 November. Formal consideration and response at programme and faculty level to reports is linked to APR. While this is the mechanism through which they are formally scrutinised and actioned, it is expected that responses to the reports are sent to external examiners much earlier. The letter to external examiners from the Dean states that the Faculty will formally respond; and the report and response will form part of APR. It is also through this mechanism that partner institutions contribute to discussions about external examiner reports. In addition to APR, partners have representatives on faculty boards where reports are discussed and also receive the reports via their Partnership Team Leaders (PTLs).

2.110 The APR reports contain detailed responses to reports and a summary section where staff are asked to highlight good practice for dissemination across the University. An action plan is also included for areas the external examiner has identified as requiring development.

2.111 The procedures for the appointment, training and consideration of reports of external examiners are robust and comprehensive. The University is taking steps to more routinely make available external examiner reports to students and the wider staff base and there is evidence that there is partner involvement in the processes. Consequently, in theory the Expectation is met. There is one concern related to the lack of submission of reports for a number of programmes and concerns raised about the consistency of marking and moderation across the whole provision for the second year running, but the review team is content that this does not affect confidence in the setting and maintenance of academic standards.

2.112 The review team explored the University's processes for making scrupulous use of external examiners through the review of documentation, including the AQH, induction presentation, external examiner reports and responses, overview reports for on and off campus activity, faculty boards, CPC, AQSC and Senate minutes and definitive programme documents. In addition the review team met staff and students from across the campuses and at partner institutions.

2.113 The names and institutions of external examiners are made available to students both on and off campus in programme of study handbooks along with a statement advising students how they can request the external examiner report. However, students the review team met for the most part did not know who the examiner was and had not seen a report. Course and faculty representatives stated that they see reports during the APR which is the mechanism through which the reports are considered and responded to. The University acknowledged this issue in meetings during the visit, and advised that, following the launch of the MyDay portal in 2014-15, the University is in the process of making all of the reports freely available via this portal to all students, regardless of area of study. In order to engage students more fully in a dialogue around content the review team **affirms** the work to ensure external examiners' reports are made available to students on the student portal.

2.114 Following receipt of external examiner reports, the Dean of Quality and Standards and the Head of Collaborative Partnerships write overview reports for on and off-campus respectively which are reviewed at senior committees. The review team queried elements of the Collaborative Provision External Examiner Overview Report for 2013-14 which related to the lack of clarity of focus of some reports and concerns raised about marking and moderation across the whole provision for the second year running. The review team **recommends** that the University strengthen the reporting arrangements for external examining to ensure more effective oversight of collaborative provision.

2.115 The review team considers that the processes for the appointment, support and use of external examiners are effective and that the University takes a thorough and considered approach to receiving and responding to reports. However, oversight of the reports at institutional level requires strengthening in relation to collaborative provision. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.116 The policies and procedures used by the University to carry out APRs and periodic Major Reviews were relatively new at the time of the review visit. They apply to all programmes leading to its awards whether delivered by the University itself or by partner institutions. The current arrangements, prescribed in detail in the AQH, had been introduced at the start of the academic year 2013-14 following the report of a working group established by AQSC to recommend institution-wide systems of monitoring and review developed out of the different processes used by SMU and TSD before the merger. The outcomes and operation of APR and Major Review are considered annually by AQSC at its meetings in March and April. The review team was therefore able to examine evidence of the evolution of relatively new systems of monitoring and periodic review over a period of two years.

2.117 The University also conducts school audits on a five to six year rotating basis. These focus on a school as a whole, rather than individual programmes, and consider, among other matters, the quality and standards of academic provision, quality assurance arrangements, the overall student experience, and the management of provision delivered through collaborative partner institutions. At the time of the review only one School Audit had taken place, in March 2015.

2.118 Annual programme reviews are conducted by programme teams and then reported to faculty and university levels. APRs are overseen, on behalf of Senate, by AQSC which receives annual overview reports of the process for taught degrees from the faculties and also reports from the Research Degrees Committee (RSC) on the standards and quality of research degrees. Major Review is the University's process for revalidating programmes of study every five years following an externally supported evaluation of all aspects of the curriculum, its delivery and student attainment and progression. AQSC receives reports from its Validation Sub-Committee (VSC) on the outcomes of Major Reviews. The University's policies and procedures for annual and periodic review provide a basis in principle for it to meet the Expectations in the Quality Code: *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*, and *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others* (Indicator 17).

2.119 The review team read recent examples of APR reports, Faculty APR Overviews, and Major Reviews as well as minutes recording consideration and oversight of these processes by AQSC, RDC and VSC. The team met staff and students who had participated in monitoring and review exercises.

2.120 The APR process includes, where applicable, representatives of partner institutions. In cases where a collaborative programme is not offered by the University, the teaching team at a partner institution produces a separate APR. Included in the information considered are external examiners' reports, data on student attainment and progression, and student feedback on modules and programmes. Faculty boards hold meetings that consider all APR reports for which the faculty is responsible, focusing on quality and standards across the faculty and in collaborative partner institutions; engagement with the current University enhancement theme; any aspects of good practice; and the identification of matters that may require action at programme, faculty or institutional level. The faculty level meetings include opportunities for student representatives to comment, though minutes show this does not always happen.

2.121 The University considers APR to be 'a continuous process: an integral part of teaching, learning and assessment activities, through which student feedback is gathered, difficulties are addressed and good practice is promoted'. Comprehensive guidance for programme teams and faculties on how to conduct APRs, Major Reviews and revalidations is set out in chapter 4 of the AQH together with templates for the construction of the necessary documentation. Following the outcomes and evaluations of the first year of operation, during 2013-14, a range of adjustments and improvements were made to the processes and applied in 2014-15. The templates were made shorter and the requirements more prescriptive. The University reported, and the team was able to observe, evidence of increasing quality and consistency in APR reports at both programme and faculty overview levels.

2.122 Major Review takes one of two forms depending on whether major changes to a programme or suite of programmes are planned or have taken place over the previous five years. Where the changes are minor the review takes the form of an extension to the APR process in which VSC revalidates the programme. Where substantial changes have taken place, or are planned, the process is essentially that of a new programme validation. However, since these procedures began in 2013 only one Major Review has taken the 'minor form' of an extended outcome of APR. This reflects the fact that there had been substantial changes to a large proportion of the University's programmes since the merger in 2012 necessitating a large volume of Major Reviews and consequent revalidations.

2.123 The documentation seen by the review team provided evidence that the processes of APR and Major Review, including the use of data provided by the University, have become more consistent and robust over the two years since 2013 and provide a secure basis for the maintenance of academic standards. In addition, meetings with students and staff confirmed the growing effectiveness of programme monitoring and review in assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities across the University's campuses. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.124 University regulations relating to complaints and appeals for taught awards and research degrees are documented in separate chapters of the Academic Quality Handbook. The institution seeks to resolve complaints as swiftly as possible, at the local level where possible, and to incorporate the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness.

2.125 The regulations contain timescales for each stage of the process and this includes communicating the outcome to the complainant. Judgements are made by staff who are independent of the case being heard and, where panels are convened, students are entitled to appear in person. A representative from the Students' Union is also present on the panel. Regulations, processes and procedures surrounding complaints and appeals take account of external reference points including guidance from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and the Academic Registrars Council.

2.126 Procedures are published on the website pages belonging to the Academic Office both as part of the Academic Quality Handbook but also as separate links. Summaries are provided to students and forms used for academic appeals contain additional guidance. Students are able to seek support and advice from the Students' Union and also from the Academic Office, who also deliver briefings to staff on handling complaints. Students are informed about their right to make representation to the OIA should they remain unhappy with the institution's decision. Complaints and appeals procedures are scrutinised as part of the annual review of the Academic Quality Handbook. This is supplemented by a report to Senate, constructed by the Academic Office, which incorporates, where appropriate, learning points from cases.

2.127 The thorough policies and procedures, clear and accessible guidance for students, explicit reference to the role of the OIA and robust monitoring arrangements are sufficient to enable this Expectation to be met in theory.

2.128 The team tested this Expectation by reading the AQH, annual report to Senate and forms relating to complaints and appeals. In addition the team met students and staff including those from collaborative partners.

2.129 The team found that complaints and appeals procedures are comprehensively documented in the AQH. The team also found that these are well understood by staff and that this is aided by detailed training material which brief staff on issues ranging from the grounds for complaints and appeal, different stages of the process and how decisions are made. The training also includes reference to the various templates involved in the process which differ for students studying on taught programmes and postgraduate research degrees.

2.130 While a number of the students the team met were not familiar with the complaints and appeals procedures the majority were confident that the information was available if needed. Students were comfortable to approach staff for information relating to complaints and appeals and a proportion of students were aware that policies and procedures were available on the website and in their handbooks.

2.131 The University's annual report on complaints and appeals provides a detailed and considered analysis of issues and trends affecting undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. The University's postgraduate research annual report contains an explicit section handling complaints and appeals and is similarly detailed.

2.132 The team found that some students were unfamiliar with the University's policies and procedures in this area because they had not had cause to access them and because they are available in a range of formats. The regulations are comprehensive and their implementation is underpinned by staff training. This together with the University's robust monitoring and review arrangements ensure that Expectation B9 is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.133 The University's strategy for collaborative provision is summarised in its Strategic Plan 2013-17 and in respect of international partnerships in its International Strategy. The University described its approach to collaboration as cautious; it is based on a number of principles including that collaborative partnerships should be academically driven and associated with cognate provision within the University.

2.134 The University delivers learning opportunities with others through a range of arrangements including franchise (also described as shared or common curriculum partnerships), validation (also described as co-developed curriculum partnerships), and articulation and outreach arrangements with a number of partner institutions in the UK and overseas. All provision must normally be delivered and assessed through the medium of Welsh and/or English. In one international partnership some teaching during the first, foundation, year is delivered through Mandarin; this provides entry to the final three years of the programmes and does not contribute to an award.

2.135 Details of the University's collaborative arrangements are provided in the Register of Collaborative Partnerships published on its webpages. The register is maintained by the Academic Office and overseen by the Collaborative Partnership Committee and is updated on a regular basis. The information on the register is supplemented by an internal partnerships database which includes a fuller set of information.

2.136 The University currently has 10 UK partners including seven further education colleges, two of which are part of its dual sector arrangements, one European partner institution and two non-European partners. At the time of the review a small number of additional partnerships were in development including an international partnership, which has been approved but is not yet operational, a partnership arrangement to deliver the University's programmes through a number of the partner's existing centres in London and overseas; one partnership was being terminated and the University was reviewing its further education partnership arrangements. The University has two articulation partnerships designed to facilitate recruitment to its programmes in the UK. At the time of the review the University was reviewing these arrangements. A small number of collaborative programmes are recognised by PSRBs.

2.137 One international partnership includes provision for dual awards with the first awards expected to be made in 2017; the Memorandum of Agreement for this partnership includes details of the responsibilities of the University and the partner institution in relation to maintaining the academic standards of the award for which each is responsible. The University has recognised that the development of more detailed processes for the management of dual awards is desirable; the team heard that awaited national guidance will inform its deliberations. The University also has arrangements for joint research degree supervision with a research institute of the University of Wales, a range of work-based learning arrangements, study abroad arrangements and involvement in collaborative activities through Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

2.138 The University retains responsibility for the academic standards of all awards granted in its name. The PVC Academic has overall executive responsibility for oversight of collaborative provision. The Head of Collaborative Partnerships and associated staff with responsibility for collaborative partnerships are located within the Academic Office. Academic oversight of collaborative provision rests with Senate, supported by its International and Collaborative Partnership Committees; Academic Quality and Standards Committee deals with those aspects relevant to its terms of reference, for example in relation to programme approval and review. At faculty level, responsibility for monitoring partnerships rests with faculty board and arrangements for research students studying through collaborative partnerships are overseen by Research Degrees Committee. Minutes of these committees at university and faculty level demonstrate appropriate upward and downward reporting and effective institutional oversight of collaborative arrangements.

2.139 Collaborative arrangements are managed in line with the University's Procedural Framework for Collaborative Provision, set out in the Academic Quality Handbook and its supporting appendices. These processes have been developed in line with the Expectations of the Quality Code. Further guidance is provided in the University's comprehensive Collaborative Partner Operations Manual, available since 2014-15, which is published on its website. For collaborative research degrees, additional information is included in the Code of Practice for Research Degrees and the Research Supervisor Handbook.

2.140 The defining characteristics of the University outlined in the University's Strategic Plan include an 'undergraduate curriculum, which delivers distinctive graduate attributes in employability' and the pioneering of 'new approaches to work-based learning and professional practice that enhance workforce and enterprise capabilities'. To help achieve these aims the University offers a variety of work-related placements within a number of its programmes, some of which are assessed. Management of placements other than those offered in relation to professionally accredited provision is set out in the AQH in the form of a Placement Protocol with a range of supporting appendices.

2.141 The Wales Institute for Work-based Learning focuses on work-based learning and professional practice based on the Professional Practice Framework (PPF), an area in which the University is recognised to have particular expertise. The framework incorporates accreditation of employers' staff development programmes, RPEL, and delivery of a range of modules leading to an academic qualification in professional practice. Regulations governing the framework are set out in the Academic Quality Handbook.

2.142 Together these frameworks enable the Expectation to be met in theory. The review team tested the operation of the policies and procedures governing the University's management of provision with others by meeting staff and students both within the University and from two of its partnerships, reading procedures and guidance for both collaborative partnerships and placement learning, minutes from the Senate, Academic Quality and Standards Committee, Collaborative Partnership Committee, Research Degrees Committee, faculty boards, documentation and reports relating to the approval and review of a number of partnerships and programmes in both the UK and overseas and external examiners' reports.

2.143 The University's approach to the approval of partnerships and associated programmes has multiple stages. The business and financial aspects of a prospective partner are considered separately from the academic merits of a potential new partner. New partners require a risk assessment and, following initial approval, a four-part due diligence process takes place. For existing partnerships, the continuing validity of due diligence information is checked through the processes of Interim and Partnership Review. If the findings of the due diligence process are satisfactory, the process of partnership approval is instigated; this is based on a visit to the prospective partner institution by a panel

appointed by Collaborative Partnership Committee on behalf of Senate. The arrangements for Partnership Review, which takes place as a minimum every five years, are set out in the AQH. Interim review takes place after either one or two years where a new partner is delivering a programme with the University for the first time. Reports of partnership approval and review demonstrate that the process is robust with appropriate external representation; reports are received at Collaborative Partnership Committee and approved through Senate.

2.144 A key feature of the University's approach to collaborative provision is the separation of approval of partner institutions from the approval of programmes. Approval and validation are undertaken in accordance with the requirements specified for on-campus programmes supplemented as appropriate; in the case of collaborative provision validation normally involves a panel event, with appropriate externality, which takes place at the partner institution (see also Expectation B1). The CVs of partner staff teaching on University programmes are approved at validation and changes to staffing are subsequently reported to the University. Staff from partner institutions confirmed that they were aware of the requirements for programme approval and validation and had been involved in robust validation processes. Consideration and approval of the reports of these events was evident in the minutes of AQSC.

2.145 Responsibilities of the University and partners are clearly set out in a Memorandum of Agreement, produced to a standard template following completion of the partnership approval process; these are signed by the Vice-Chancellor or Chair of Council and the partner. There is a separate template for articulation arrangements. Memoranda of Agreement include a Partnership Responsibility Protocol setting out the University's expectations including in relation to admissions, monitoring and review, assessment, external examining and the student voice (See also Expectations B1, B5, B6, B7 and B8). The University has a standard expectation that responsibility for the admission and registration of students rests with the partner institution (see also Expectation B2). All agreements have a defined lifespan and are formally reviewed at specified intervals. Partners confirmed that they were clear about their responsibilities and viewed the Memorandum of Agreement as a key document in this respect.

2.146 External examining arrangements for collaborative partnerships follow those for on-campus programmes (see Expectation B7). Where a programme is offered in more than one location, wherever possible the same external examiner is appointed. In 2013-14 the University revised its template for external examiner reports to include a separate section for completion where a programme is offered at several locations and/or at a partner institution. The University noted that whereas the majority of external examiners completed this additional section where relevant, a number of longer-standing external examiners did not, a matter which the University is addressing in respect of the 2015 reports. Following receipt of external examiner reports, the Head of Collaborative Partnerships writes an overview report which is reviewed at senior committees; issues raised in the overview report for 2013-14 included those relating to non-submission of one external examiner report and that other external examiners had not referred explicitly to provision at partners or had raised concerns about the consistency of the processes of marking and moderation. The review team has recommended the strengthening of reporting arrangements for external examining to ensure more effective oversight of collaborative provision (see Expectation B7).

2.147 Collaborative programmes are monitored by the University in accordance with its arrangements for Annual Programme Review (APR) supplemented by additional requirements set out in the AQH. Partner institutions are expected to either produce their own APR reports or to contribute to the University's own evaluation of the relevant programme(s); partners who met the team confirmed their input into these processes. From 2014-15 partner institutions are also required to submit an overview report to a standard template; at the time of the review it was too early to comment on the effectiveness of this

approach. As with on-campus provision, Major Review of programmes is undertaken as a minimum every five years (see also Expectation B8). The University has substantial experience of terminating partnerships and has robust procedures in place; a recent addition is the development of an exit strategy for articulation agreements, which will be included in the AQH for 2015-16.

2.148 The University retains sole authority for issuing certificates and transcripts relating to collaborative programmes. Existing certificates state that information about the language and location of study is provided on the transcript. The transcript includes the name of the partner institution and the language of study. For awards issued from 2014-15 onwards, the name of the partner institution will be included on the certificate.

2.149 Communications with partners at institutional level are coordinated through a small team within the Academic Office, led by the Head of Collaborative Partnerships; the first annual briefing event for partner institutions took place in December 2014. Each collaborative partnership has a Partnership Co-ordinator appointed by Senate to oversee the smooth operation of all aspects of the partnership. PTLs take a more operational role and are responsible for ensuring that standards are consistent with the level of award proposed and for helping to maintain and enhance the quality of the collaborative provision. PTLs take on a range of developmental, monitoring and assessment functions; training is provided for staff undertaking these roles. PTLs are expected to have regular contact with and normally visit partners at least twice a year. PTLs submit formal reports to Collaborative Partnership Committee and the relevant Faculty, which further contribute to the oversight of collaborative arrangements. Partner staff spoke highly of the ongoing communication and support they receive from the University and in particular through the roles of Partnership Co-ordinators and PTLs. The review team concludes that the engagement of the University with its collaborative partners through the roles of Partnership Co-ordinators and PTLs is **good practice**. A range of staff development opportunities are also provided to partner institutions.

2.150 Many of the University's programmes include opportunities for placements or other forms of work-based learning; volunteering opportunities are also available. Some placement opportunities such as those relating to initial teacher training are managed in accordance with the requirements of the relevant PSRB. For other forms of placement, management is in accordance with the comprehensive Placement Protocol together with its supporting appendices set out in the AQH. Faculties are responsible for maintaining placement records and placement officers ensure appropriate adherence to procedures. The University has recently audited placement activity across the University; findings from this audit are expected to feed into subsequent revisions of the Placement Protocol. It has also been agreed that the remits of Academic Policy Committee and Academic Quality and Standards Committee will be amended to refer to responsibilities for placement policy and placement oversight respectively. Students who met the team reported varying experiences of work-based learning and placement activity but where they had undertaken these their view of the experience was generally positive.

2.151 As part of its commitment to internationalisation, the University offers a range of reciprocal study abroad opportunities, through ERASMUS in Europe and with a small number of institutions in Asia and North America. Applications are considered on an individual basis and the arrangements are managed and coordinated by the International Office. Marks obtained during a period of study abroad are accepted only where specifically approved at validation; in all other cases, the work is reviewed on the student's return to the University. Currently only a small number of students take up these opportunities; students who had taken up a study abroad opportunity were positive about their experiences.

2.152 The review team considers that the University has comprehensive processes for the management of provision with others and that these are operated effectively across the

institution. Partners spoke positively regarding the relationship with the University and the support they received. There are appropriate mechanisms in place to manage student placement opportunities. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.153 At the time of the review, just over 220 research students were registered with the University. Compared with the sector, relatively high proportions were part-time and distance learning students or members of academic staff registered for research degrees. In 2013-14 77 per cent of those registered were distance learning students, 47 per cent were normally resident outside the UK or Ireland and some 20 per cent were members of staff.

The research student population is unevenly distributed across the University's campuses with the largest number concentrated within the Faculty of Humanities and Performing Arts and based primarily on the Lampeter campus. Research degree provision began on the London campus in October 2012, although currently no additional MPhil and PhD students were being recruited, and a DBA was introduced there in February 2013.

2.154 At the time of the review no students were registered with partner institutions. However, a collaborative partnership approval and programme validation and approval processes had been successfully completed for the Prince's School of Traditional Arts, but no students had yet been recruited. The University collaborates with the University of Wales' Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies (CAWCS) providing joint supervision of some candidates as well as shared staff development and research events. UWTSD and CAWCS representatives sit on each other's research degrees committees and an agreement is in place to cover joint supervision.

2.155 Since the creation of UWTSD in 2012, 40 to 50 research degrees have been awarded each year of which just over 30 have been doctoral awards. Until July 2014 research students registered with the University prepared for University of Wales awards. Since July 2014 the University has exercised its own research degree awarding powers. All students registered at that point were given the option of continuing to a University of Wales or a UWTSD award. Twenty-two elected to remain with the University of Wales and 10 had submitted their theses for examination.

2.156 Since 2010, the University has established a single set of regulations and procedures for the management of research degrees and the supervision and support of students that replace the separate systems inherited from the merged institutions of University of Wales, Lampeter and Trinity University College, and Swansea Metropolitan University. These developments have involved not only changes in regulations, and of governance, administrative and data management systems, but also the introduction of common processes for the admission, induction, training, supervision and examination of students across seven campuses. A significant element of the changes has been a need to inform and support staff, used to the various procedures and cultures of the original institutions, as they adapted to the new common arrangements.

2.157 The University has in place a common set of regulations and a code of practice governing the admission, supervision, training, monitoring and examination of its research students which allow it in principle to comply with the Expectation *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*.

2.158 The team reviewed regulations and the documentation describing the policies and processes for admission, supervision, student progress, research training, thesis submission, examiners and examinations, student representation and academic appeals. Recent minutes and papers of the committees responsible for research students were read by the team. In addition, the team met a sample of research students registered at the University as well as academic and administrative staff responsible for their support.

2.159 Detailed oversight of supervision and training for research students and of the monitoring of their progress is exercised by the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) which reports to both the University Research Committee (URC) and to AQSC. The documentation seen by the review team demonstrated the care with which the RDC reviewed the progress of each student annually. Within faculties, management of provision varies depending on the number of students. Some faculties with a large intake appoint a Director of Research Degrees for each School and others, with a smaller intake of students, have one central Faculty Director of Research Degrees. Supervisors report to the RDC indirectly through their faculty Director of Research and provide feedback through the annual review process and at other key progression points.

2.160 The Postgraduate Research Office (PGRO) supports the operation of the RDC, and the administration of provision above the level of the faculties including arrangements for the assessment of research students, quality assurance and data management. Its staff, in common with most professional services staff, work across all campuses. In 2014 the University had conducted an audit of the provision of skills training for postgraduate research students at central, faculty and school levels, and also of the support and integration of students into the University's research environment and culture. The report had recommended the creation of a Graduate School to manage these functions into which the PGRO would be integrated. The University planned to set up the Graduate School during 2015-16.

2.161 Students, and staff involved in their supervision, met by the team confirmed the clarity and comprehensiveness of the framework of regulation, guidance and support that had been developed by the University in the form of the quality handbook, the code of practice, supervisor and student handbooks, admissions procedures, student induction arrangements, staff training sessions and the administrative functions of the PGRO.

2.162 The University recognised the challenge of involving the relatively large proportion of distance students in the research culture. A research training programme is organised across the University. Schools seek to ensure an inclusive research environment by recording their research seminars and making them available through the VLE. Similarly, where possible, all sessions of research training are recorded and distributed to external students via the VLE. Research students are supported by their faculties in attending conferences and other research-related events and activities. Opportunities for participation in the research environment are explained during the induction process. London campus PhD students meet monthly as a cohort for research training and presentation of research papers.

2.163 A significant part of the research student experience is a graduate summer school, held on the Lampeter campus each year in July. As part of the week-long programme, students receive training in essential research skills, and give papers to their peers. For many external students the summer school also offers the opportunity for intensive tutorials with their supervisors. Attendance is mainly by students close to the start of their research activity and had included students from London and Swansea campuses.

2.164 At the time of the review eight graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) were involved in teaching and all had enrolled in a formal training programme involving completion of a module of the HEA-accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education.

2.165 The supervision and monitoring of students is governed by the code of practice and expectations are made clear in both the supervisor and research student handbooks. All students are allocated to a supervisory team of trained staff and meetings with supervisors generally take place once a month. Some students travel considerable distances to attend face-to-face meetings every month; others have a number of supervisory meetings via electronic means and then come to the University several times per year for intensive study periods or attend the annual graduate research summer school. Students may elect to have some of their meetings via online video link because of other commitments.

2.166 The assessment of research students is managed by the PGRO and includes at least one external examiner. The criteria are based on CQFW level descriptors and comprehensive regulations and guidance for examiners and students are set out in the AQH, the Code of Practice and the student and supervisor handbooks.

2.167 The review team regards the comprehensive range of academic and pastoral support provided for all students is **good practice** (see Expectations B3 and B4). The review team concludes that the University's provision and management of research degrees meets the Expectation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.168 In reaching a judgement about the quality of learning opportunities, the review team considered a significant range of University documentation and met students and staff from both the University and a selection of its collaborative partners.

2.169 The review team noted a number of examples of good practice: the comprehensive range of academic and pastoral support provided for all students, the use of an interactive online system to gather and act on student feedback and the engagement of the University with its collaborative partners through the roles of partnership coordinators and partnership link tutors.

2.170 All of the Expectations in this area are met and the associated risks in 10 of the 11 Expectations are low. The challenges experienced by the University and the Students' Union in constructing and implementing an effective system of student representation for the merged institution are being addressed by the newly-established Student Experience Department and the review team has affirmed the work of this department in supporting the Students' Union to strengthen oversight of the student representative system, and the training of student representatives.

2.171 In one area the associated risks are deemed to be moderate. The review team has made a number of recommendations in the area of assessment to strengthen the University's processes including clarifying aspects of the arrangements in respect of examination boards, adopting a consistent approach to ensuring that all students are provided with clear grading criteria, ensuring that assessment feedback is provided in line with University expectations and strengthening the management and oversight of external examining in collaborative provision.

2.172 The review team also affirms work already underway to inform students about action taken in response to their feedback, achieving a common understanding throughout the University in relation to the new extenuating circumstances procedure and ensuring that external examiners' reports are made available to students on the student portal.

2.173 Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information About Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The University's website is the primary mechanism for providing information for all stakeholders. The site contains clear information on mission and values, strategies and policies, together with all aspects of the University's provision. The website is developed and maintained by the Technology Enhanced Learning Department. A new Marketing Communications Strategy will be implemented for 2015, having already been developed at the time of the review, but it was too early for the team to evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy.

3.2 The review team explored the University's approach to the provision of information by considering a range of documentation available to internal and external stakeholders such as a range of prospectuses from various partner institutions, students guides, handbooks, quality assurance policies, committee minutes, and regulations. The review team met students and staff from across the institution to assess the reliability and awareness of this process.

3.3 The University takes account of external reference points and guidance in relation to the production of information, as well as the provisions of the Welsh Language Act. Information is provided in both Welsh and English as appropriate.

3.4 The website contains comprehensive information on entry requirements, application and admission to the University for both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Additional information is provided for international students, part-time and distance learning students. Fee information is also published on the website together with information about scholarships and bursaries and a statement on the University's approach to recognising prior learning.

3.5 The website also contains information on the Welsh Language Scheme Implementation Plan. The Strategic Plan sets out the University's commitment to Wales, both in terms of its close relationships with employers and communities, and in terms of its role as a major provider of bilingual and Welsh medium higher education. The University is active in contributing to the development of Welsh medium educational resources and has its own publication house, Canolfan Peniarth. The headquarters of Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol are located in Carmarthen at the University's Cultural Enterprise Centre and the University is represented on the Coleg's major committees. Promotion of the Welsh language is a continuing process, particularly on the Swansea campuses where its use is less prevalent. The Students' Union is working towards becoming a signatory to the Welsh Language Charter for Welsh Universities' Students' Unions, developed by NUS Wales.

3.6 Prospective students can find information about the application process in the prospectus and also online. Information for international students covers immigration and visa requirements and there is a dedicated guide.

3.7 All taught students are provided with a Programme of Study Handbook constructed from a standard template. Programme-specific information is provided in a standard format

on the website which clearly indicates key facts about each programme of study, including the nature of the curriculum, approaches to assessment and careers opportunities.

3.8 Marketing and communications staff produce most publicity material; however, school and campus specific information is produced at local level to help students gain a fuller understanding of what their particular learning experience is likely to be like. Heads of school and unit managers are required to approve information before publications are approved at a senior level. Programme directors hold responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of information together with the head of school. Prospectuses are approved at senior directorate level. The students confirmed the accuracy of the information provided.

3.9 Students are provided with a range of printed and online information to support their induction and studies. General expectations are set out in the Student Charter. All students are issued with a Programme of Study Handbook, produced to a standard template and supplemented where appropriate with module guides and extensive information provided via the learning environment. Research degree students are provided with a Research Student Handbook which is provided by the Postgraduate Research Office. A wide range of information is produced for London-based students including a dedicated student handbook. Students confirmed that all the material they received was accurate.

3.10 There is a series of web-based student guides to the academic regulations intended to provide a student-friendly summary of relevant sections of the AQH, including those sections relating to complaints and appeals. The team found some confusion relating to the understanding of the ECP process among both staff and students. However, the University is implementing measures to ensure consistency of approach across all sites and the review team affirms this approach (see Expectation B6).

3.11 Most of the information produced by central departments is now web-based, ensuring ease of access across campuses and externally.

3.12 On completion of their programmes of study, students are provided with a transcript setting out the modules they have studied and the credits achieved; where they have achieved an award, a certificate is also provided. Certificates are bilingual and the wording of transcripts reflects the language of study.

3.13 The Register of Collaborative Partnerships is also published on the website and oversight is maintained by the Head of Collaborative Partnerships. Memoranda of Agreement covering shared, common and co-developed curriculum partnerships make clear that the University retains responsibility for the accuracy of all public information, publicity and promotional activity relating to its collaborative provision, the operational arrangements for which are set out in the AQH. Further guidance is provided in the Collaborative Partnership Operations Manual. For students studying at a partner site, Programme of study handbooks are expected to include, as a minimum, the information included in the University own handbook template, which includes standard text relating to matters such as complaints and appeals, contextualised as appropriate to the partner institution. To ensure that these processes are working as intended, PTLs are asked to collect examples of promotional materials on their regular visits and are also responsible for checking the accuracy of programme information provided for applicants and students (see also Expectation B10).

3.14 At institutional level, communications with partners are coordinated through a small team within the Academic Office, led by the Head of Collaborative Partnerships. A range of enhancements have been put in place, including the Collaborative Partner Operations Manual and the production of a newsletter.

3.15 The first annual briefing event for partner institutions took place in December 2014 and was attended by representatives from almost all partner institutions, together with staff

from across the University. These developments have been very well received and are serving to consolidate the University's relationship with both new and existing partner institutions.

3.16 The University has sole authority for issuing certificates and transcripts relating to collaborative programmes. The transcript includes the name of the partner institution and lists the programme and module titles in the language of study. For awards issued from 2014-15 onwards, the name of the partner institution will be included on the certificate.

3.17 Overall, the review team considers that the University produces information on the quality of learning opportunities that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The approach to the provision of information is thorough. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.18 In reaching a judgement on the accuracy, integrity and completeness of published information, the review team scrutinised a range of documentation (both published in hard copy and via electronic media and published in English and in Welsh) made available to prospective, current and former students and other stakeholders. The review team also explicitly considered the requirement of the Wider Information Set, and publication of external examiner reports as well as reflecting upon the implementation of a student charter by the provider. The University has set out its communication in Welsh in its Welsh Language Scheme, published in accordance with the Welsh Language Act 1993. While attention was given to compliance with statutory requirements as relates to data protection, the provision and security of personal information and the expectations of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, these fell outside the direct scrutiny of the review.

3.19 The review team found that the University had considered the formal requirements of this aspect of the Quality Code, and had ensured that it was possible to demonstrate its compliance with the broad Expectation and its engagement with the indicators informing that Expectation.

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

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The University's approach to quality enhancement is described in the Academic Quality Handbook (AQH) Chapter 11 (introduced in 2013-14). The Strategic Plan and the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy 2014-15 2016-17 also outline the University's aims for enhancement, the former more implicit than the latter. The appointment of a new Dean for Learning, Teaching and Enhancement (LTE) in early 2014-15 was seen to give a fresh impetus to implementing an effective institutional approach to enhancement. A revised Strategy was presented to the March 2015 meeting of the Senate in light of the view that the original strategy had too large a number of objectives and performance indicators, which were difficult to measure. The revised strategy is now more realistically focused on three pillars around professional recognition, professional development and research and scholarship. The infrastructure for supporting enhancement initiatives is facilitated principally through faculties and the Enhancement Unit. The University was aware that the challenges of merger had hampered progress before this academic session. The LTE strategy and the initiatives arising from it are monitored at LTEC and via the annual programme review exercise. The University determines its priorities for enhancement on the basis of evidence gathered at school/departmental level, faculty level and University level. The Dean of LTE prepares a summary report for the last meeting of Senate in each academic session from which the following year's themes are agreed. The review team was assured of the effectiveness of the lines of communication between school, faculty and University level committees in relation to enhancement. Faculty annual monitoring reports contain a specific section on enhancement and the review team saw evidence that discussions take place around the initial findings from those reports at the University's main committees.

4.2 The University has engaged fully in the Future Directions for Higher Education in Wales work coordinated by the Higher Education Academy. Both the current and former Deans of Learning, Teaching and Enhancement were members of the Future Directions Steering Group from 2011-12 and 2013-14; the former Dean also led the Students as Partners work strand during its first cycle. The Future Directions publications include case studies illustrating the various initiatives undertaken by the founding institutions in each of the work strands during the first cycle of themes. For Learning in Employment there were case studies on support for dyslexic workers and the LATERAL project to support staff development in the workplace; for Learning for Employment, case studies included alternative assessment for employability, and a range of projects relating to arts and the creative industries; and for Students as Partners, contributions ranged from studies of student retention initiatives to the development of The Student Researcher. For the previous two years the University had intentionally selected Future Directions themes as their own enhancement themes. The University also held a Future Directions mini-conference in October 2014 in order to disseminate the good practice described in the presentations made by contributors to the HEA Future Directions Conference in 2014. Work on the second cycle of themes is currently underway at institutional level, led by the LTEC Chair. An example is the Distinctive Graduates theme. The faculties undertook analysis of how learning opportunities for students in their programmes would develop graduate distinctiveness.

4.3 In 2013-14 the Enhancement Unit was tasked with developing an enhancement culture. To this end the Unit worked with Staff Development to establish a continuing

professional development programme for the session 2014-15 mapped against the UK Professional Standards Framework and the Future Directions themes. This led from the initial work on 'Lunch 'n' Learn' and associated activities during 2013-14 and culminated in a conference in term 2. Staff were very positive about the learning and teaching conference which had taken place in May, noting the opportunities to share best practice and adapt it within their own subject areas. The review team was made aware of other staff development measures contributing to enhancement (see Expectation B4) .

4.4 The University has demonstrated that it has engaged with the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). The self-evaluation document, submitted to QAA as part of this review, states eight routes to HEA Fellowship, all of which are mapped to the framework. It is also referenced in relation to assessment. While the University notes the current number of staff with accreditation to be lower than preferred, steps are being taken to improve the percentage by the production of a simple guide to the requirements of the various routes, Faculty-based sessions on 'becoming HEA Fellows', and making more explicit the links between the many professional development events and the UKPSF. In one meeting staff noted that they had been provided with a mentor to help them with the application process.

4.5 A particular focus of the University's enhancement agenda is sustainability. There is an Institute of Sustainable Practice, Innovation and Resource Effectiveness (INSPIRE) which leads on this agenda and there is a Sustainability Strategy. Each faculty has written a Sustainability Plan and reports progress to the Sustainability Committee. The Committee is a subcommittee of the Central Resources Committee. In order to maintain an academic and resources brief, the academic lead for INSPIRE sits on both the Sustainability Committee and LTEC. Initiatives in this area include environmental issues such as paperless examination boards and work being provided to external examiners electronically. New programmes are required to address how they meet the University's Sustainability Strategy. Since the beginning of 2014-15 all new and revised module descriptors have included a section that specifically addresses the sustainability agenda.

4.6 New internship opportunities have been established in partnership with the Students' Union for students to make 'One Planet Living' commitments - a promise to be active on sustainability issues during their university experience. Nine were created in 2013-14 and there are seven in 2014-15.

4.7 The University's policy and strategies in relation to enhancement are detailed and clear following a revision of the LTE Strategy. Staff articulated the institution's approach well in meetings and were able to offer examples of enhancement in action through both developments in the curriculum and through University-wide initiatives such as the Future Directions themes. In theory the University's approach to enhancement meets the Expectation.

4.8 The review team explored the effectiveness and impact of the University's approach to enhancement through the analysis of strategies (LTE Strategy, Sustainability Strategy, Strategic Plan), policies and procedures from the AQH, committee meetings and through discussion with academic, support staff and students from across campuses and partner institutions.

4.9 The process by which enhancement is considered at different levels within the University works well and it is evident that it is a key consideration at major points in the quality lifecycle, such as APR and Major Review. However, while staff appeared knowledgeable about enhancement themes and aspirations in relation to students as global citizens, employability and sustainability, students displayed far less awareness.

4.10 The review team considers that the University takes deliberate steps at an institutional level to improve the quality of student learning opportunities through both

institutional-led initiatives and local activities. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The University has adopted a common framework for enhancement and its monitoring and takes deliberate steps at an institutional level to improve the quality of student learning opportunities through both institutional-led initiatives and local activities. The review team was able to identify examples across the merged institution.

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

5 Commentary on Internationalisation

5.1 The University Strategic Plan views the development of international education as a key priority. This is underpinned by an International Strategy which includes a dedicated action plan. The central premise of the institution's approach is to reduce reliance on government funding and it therefore focuses on recruitment activity. Oversight of this work is undertaken by the International Committee which reports to Senate. Council also has a dedicated International Sub-Committee which considers risks and resource implications attached to international activity.

5.2 To support the delivery of the University's International Action Plan dedicated staff support has been created in the form of a Dean of International Education and two Associate Pro Vice-Chancellors who oversee the London and Welsh campuses respectively. These senior post-holders form the management team for the International Office, including recruitment activity.

5.3 The University has paid attention to international reference points in the form of the *International Students Studying in the UK - Guidance for Higher Education Providers (2012)*, published by QAA. The University is also active within the UK Council for International Student Affairs and British Universities International Liaison Association. University qualifications articulate with the *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA)* and the institution has mapped policies and procedures against the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA.

5.4 A register of collaborative partnerships is maintained by the University and published online. The University does not operate any international campuses but has recently secured approval for a partnership venture to open overseas learning centres, initially in Sri Lanka and subsequently Kazakhstan and Oman, with the London School of Commerce, alongside the School's London campus. The University has formal international partnerships with IBAT College Dublin, Asian International College in Singapore and Wuhan University of Technology in China. All partnerships, together with a newly approved partnership in Hong Kong, have been approved or reviewed and re-approved by the University post-merger. Further partnerships are envisaged (see Expectation B10).

5.5 The University has worked to significantly strengthen its processes for international student recruitment. Contracts have been reviewed with all agents and terminated with providers whose service has not been to the desired standard. The University has instead appointed its own Marketing and Recruitment Team, developed its own direct marketing materials and identified new markets to concentrate on. The University has also acted on advice and guidance provided by UK Visas and Immigration especially in relation to its visa rejection rate. Oversight of this work is taking place at the International Committee.

5.6 The Strategic Plan explicitly references the importance of global citizenship. The team found clear evidence of internationalisation in the curriculum. The University was able to highlight programmes which draw on international theories and approaches, developed specifically for an international student audience, and uses international speakers and also a suite of linguistics programmes. Students are also able to access study abroad opportunities. Despite this the team found that only a small proportion of students have taken the opportunity to study abroad and the majority of undergraduate students the team met considered that their programmes had a national focus rather than an international focus. Where students do access study abroad opportunities they are supported by a dedicated Study Abroad Coordinator who is responsible for maintaining the detailed Semester Abroad Handbook.

5.7 International students are able to access support through the International Office who also act as a point of referral. Information on services is provided in a dedicated International Student Guide and also through literature housed on the VLE. The University operates two virtual learning environments at the moment. However, the literature for international students housed on the platform for students at Carmarthen and Lampeter was not available for students using the Swansea platform. Students are provided with a comprehensive and compulsory induction, an airport collection service is in operation and a Welfare Officer organises a cultural programme, hosts a drop-in clinic and maintains regular contact with international students.

Glossary

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

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See **technology enhanced or enabled learning**.

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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