Bangor University

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

May 2012

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a standard Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Bangor University ('the University'). Higher education provided through partnership agreements with other organisations (collaborative provision) has been reviewed alongside the University's main educational provision.

The review took place from 14 to 18 May 2012 and was conducted by a team of six reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Colin Raban
- Mrs Claire Blanchard
- Ms Martina Rohr
- Professor Danny Saunders
- Miss Sarah Ingram (student reviewer)
- Mr Tony Platt (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education (including collaborative provision) provided by Bangor University and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - threshold academic standards[1]
  - the quality of learning opportunities
- provides commentaries on public information and the theme (postgraduate research and enhancement)
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice.

A summary of the key 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 4.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] For background information about Bangor University see Annex A: About Bangor University starting on page 18. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for Institutional Review of higher education institutions in Wales[3] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

---

[1] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx
[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/institutional-review.aspx

Key findings

The QAA review team considered a large quantity of evidence relating to the educational provision at Bangor University, both information supplied in advance and evidence gathered during the visits of the review itself. The review has enabled the QAA review team to arrive at two judgements about the University.

QAA's judgements about Bangor University

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Bangor University.

- **Confidence** can be placed in the soundness of Bangor University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.
- **Confidence** can be placed in the soundness of Bangor University's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following recommendations to Bangor University.

Advisable

The review team **advises** Bangor University to:

- review the constitutions, accountability and operation of groups and committees, together with the nature and quality of the information provided to and from them, so as to secure Senate's oversight of the full range of academic provision (paragraph 1.3.6)
- review the academic effectiveness of revalidation events at which a large number and/or diverse range of programmes are considered (paragraph 2.3.4)
- ensure that all programmes are aligned with relevant subject benchmarks (paragraph 1.4.2)
- ensure that consistently accurate information is given in student handbooks (paragraph 7.1)
- secure the accuracy and currency of information for prospective students throughout the University's website (paragraph 7.2).

Desirable

The review team considers it **desirable** for Bangor University to:

- consider how further reflection on external examiners' reports can take place at school and college levels (paragraph 2.4.3)
- expedite the adoption of its requirements for consistency of assessment practice (paragraph 2.5.4)
- continue to develop and disseminate criteria for the definition of scholarship, building on the recently agreed promotion pathways for teaching staff (paragraph 3.2.4)
- review arrangements for meetings of school and college committees to enhance student engagement with them (paragraph 1.3.8)

- consider introducing systematic evaluation of its academic support provision (paragraph 5.4).

Features of good practice

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

- The work of the Miles Dyslexia Centre, where research has enhanced support provision across the University and more widely (paragraph 3.2.5).
- The Peer Guide Scheme, which provides an excellent introduction to student life at Bangor University (paragraph 3.4.5).
- The work of Canolfan Bedwyr in enhancing Welsh language provision (paragraph 5.3).

Detailed findings about Bangor University

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail. It supplies sufficient evidence to support and clarify the review team's judgements, statements and recommendations.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary[4] 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.[5]

1   Academic Management Framework

1.1   Senate, colleges and schools

1.1.1   The University has 23 academic schools grouped into six colleges, with responsibility for budgetary, managerial and strategic matters. Schools retain responsibility for student enrolment, the management of degree programmes, academic quality and standards, and for the delivery of teaching and learning. Apart from a requirement that schools establish boards of studies, the University does not prescribe the committees that should be established at school or college level.

1.1.2   The Charter describes Senate as 'the academic authority of the University'. It is 'responsible for the academic work of [the University], both in teaching and research, and for the regulation and superintendence of the education and discipline of…students' and it is supported by several sub-committees. Responsibility for the quality and standards of taught programmes lies with schools' boards of studies, and ultimately with the Senate, while Senate's Postgraduate Committee oversees the University's provision for postgraduate research students.

1.2   The University's Executive and its task groups

1.2.1   The terms of reference of the University's Executive, which comprises the Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellors, the Heads of College and other senior officers of the University, include responsibilities for: the overall day-to-day management and administration of the University; its size, academic shape and structure; and for monitoring the performance of the University in all its aspects. The Executive is also empowered to establish task groups 'to assist with, and advise upon, the management of the University's affairs'.

1.2.2   There are currently 24 task groups, and two of the task groups - Teaching and Learning (TLTG) and Quality Assurance and Validation (QAVTG) - oversee the management of the quality and standards of taught programmes. They were described by staff as standing between the Executive and Senate on the one hand, and schools and colleges on the other. The Academic Registry then facilitates the flow of information between schools or colleges and the task groups. Although the task groups are not formally accountable to Senate, the team was informed that members of the Executive chair task group meetings. They are responsible for identifying matters that require academic judgement and which would therefore be referred to Senate or to one of its sub-committees.

---

[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx
[5] See note 3.

1.3 Accountability of schools and colleges

1.3.1   Heads of school are line-managed by heads of college. Although the team was told that the colleges deal only with budgetary, managerial and strategic matters, it was apparent that some have established their own Teaching and Learning Committees and have appointed senior staff with responsibilities in this area. The team noted that this development could be justified by a head of college's responsibility for the implementation of 'the University's policies and strategies', and is consistent with the representation of each college on the TLTG and the Executive. The team was informed by staff that the colleges play a valued role in ensuring consistency between their constituent schools, and in promoting inter-school collaboration.

1.3.2   Under the University's current arrangements, the activities of schools are overseen by the QAVTG and the TLTG. The accountability of schools to these task groups is secured by the University annual review and internal quality audit procedures and, in considering the reports generated by these procedures, members of the Executive determine whether there are matters that require academic judgement and should therefore be referred to Senate.

1.3.3   Some of the documents supplied by the University expressed concerns about the extent of variation between the practices and procedures adopted by schools. The student submission commented critically on differences between the schools in relation to such matters as the provision of personal tutors, anonymous marking, the implementation of a categorical marking policy, and arrangements for dealing with cases of suspected plagiarism. Although school boards of studies are described as being answerable to Senate, there is no formal mechanism to secure their accountability or consistency across colleges and schools.

1.3.4   The team considered that in some cases the minutes of board meetings lacked the level of detail that would provide Senate or any other University committee or group with an assurance that schools were discharging their responsibilities in an appropriate manner. The team also considered it possible that the large number and diverse range of programmes for which some boards are responsible could limit their ability to exercise effective oversight of a school's academic provision.

1.3.5   The team considered that while the Postgraduate Committee takes full responsibility for the University postgraduate research provision, Senate and its committees are less directly involved in assuring the quality and standards of taught programmes. The team was informed that although Senate had been recently 're-empowered', there is scope for the further development of its role. This might include the designation of some task groups as committees of Senate, thus potentially enhancing the information flow and decision making between different levels within the organisational structure.

1.3.6   The team considers it **advisable** that the University review the constitutions, accountability and operation of groups and committees, together with the nature and quality of the information provided to and from them, so as to secure Senate's oversight of the full range of academic provision. The University might wish to consider whether the role of colleges might also be developed to strengthen the accountability of schools to Senate.

1.3.7   The report of the previous Institutional Review had recommended that the University 'monitor the operation of the task groups to confirm that the system of appointment on grounds of particular expertise does not limit the participation of students and staff in the deliberative processes of the institution'. The University responded to this recommendation by deciding that there should be 'constituency' representation on some task groups and the Executive. The team noted that task group 'constituency' representatives were appointments by virtue of office or were selected on the basis of their expertise, and

senior staff confirmed that there is no formal provision for the election of staff members to Senate and its committees. The team also observed that Students' Union sabbatical officers represent students on University committees and groups; however the team was informed by students that not all schools were meeting University requirements in a way that ensured the adequate representation of students on their boards of studies.

1.3.8   The team concluded that it would be **desirable** for the University to review arrangements for meetings of school and college committees to enhance student engagement with them.

1.4   Academic Infrastructure

1.4.1   The review team was able to confirm that the University generally makes appropriate use of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and other external reference points, in particular those from professional bodies. Academic standards are defined as part of the programme development process, and validation and revalidation panels are required to confirm relevant sections of the Quality Code have been adequately considered. The University has instituted its own codes of practice, which correspond with the previous QAA *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*), and it might wish to assure itself whether this process will continue to provide an effective way of confirming alignment with the new sections of the Quality Code.

1.4.2   Programme specifications closely follow QAA guidelines; they are routinely submitted at programme approval and reviews, and all programme specifications refer to the consideration of subject benchmark statements. However, the review team noted an example of a master's programme that had not been aligned with the relevant benchmark statement, and the team therefore considers it **advisable** that the University ensure that all programmes are aligned with the relevant subject benchmarks.

1.5   Conclusion

1.5.1   The review team found that the University was operating with appropriate regard to the Quality Code*,* in particular in its approach to approval, monitoring and review, and therefore formed the view that **confidence** can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards. The review team draws the University's attention to paragraphs 1.3.6, 1.3.8 and 1.4.2.

2   Academic standards

2.1   Programme, module and course approval

2.1.1   The framework for quality assurance is outlined in the University's Code of Practice for Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review, which has been developed in direct reference to the QAA *Code of practice*. Approval of modules is generally operated through an annual Module Approval Panel, organised by the Academic Registry and subsequently confirmed through the appropriate programme approval event at which an external assessor is present. An annual New Course Scrutiny Committee scrutinises programme outlines before recommending them to the Executive Committee for approval for validation. These central processes ensure the quality of documentation up to validation, with consideration being given to University regulations and the availability of resources.

2.2 Annual review

2.2.1 Annual review arrangements for modules and programmes are conducted through report forms. While responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of modules remains with schools/colleges, the effectiveness of programmes is monitored through the submission of completed pro forma summaries (known as QA1 forms) to the QAVTG, who also receive an annual overview report produced by the Academic Registry. These reports for the last three years show varied levels of engagement with annual review processes at course level, although they are commendable for their scrupulous identification of non-compliance with the University's code of practice requirements.

2.2.2 The review team noted low levels of critical engagement with annual review activity in a number of programmes and modules at school or college level. The University has recognised the need to review the forms, which currently do not sufficiently encourage the development of evaluative and self-critical comments. The review team also noted variability in the consideration or debate of module and programme delivery throughout its school and college committee structure. However, the University recognises that the annual monitoring form does not take account of issues emerging from accreditation reports by external agencies and therefore these issues are not covered by the Annual Development Plans. The University might wish to consider whether its procedures for annual module review and course review routinely generate sufficient information and critical evaluation that enable all schools/colleges to discharge their responsibilities for quality assurance in a timely and reflective manner.

2.3 Periodic review

2.3.1 The University currently implements internal quality audits (IQAs) and revalidation events for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes at five-yearly intervals. The IQA process precedes revalidation by one year and is commendable for its focus on the student experience and its consideration of issues such as learning resources, developments in the school, student evaluation, attendance and induction, data for recruitment and achievement, professional body accreditation, and staff resources and development. The IQAs are rigorous in identifying lack of compliance with the University's regulatory systems, lack of engagement with the annual monitoring process and with student-staff committees, and inaccurate student information in module and course handbooks. The review team considered that issues relating to the variability of quality assurance mechanisms operating at school and college committee level should be monitored more frequently than the current five-year period. The team noted that the University is currently reviewing the effectiveness of the IQA process and is engaged in some pilots combining the two audits. It plans to introduce an IQA mid-term review to assist in monitoring action plans and ensuring compliance.

2.3.2 While the review team found no evidence to suggest that programmes generally are not subject to an appropriate level of scrutiny in the revalidation events, the University might wish to ensure that equal consideration is given to each programme where a large number and a diverse range of subjects are considered. The audit team noted a course approval and revalidation event report at which new courses, a large number and diverse range of existing courses, and a large number of new and existing modules were presented for validation and revalidation with only one external assessor present. The University might wish to consider the distinctiveness of both IQA and revalidation processes to avoid overlapping agendas.

2.3.3 Equally, the University might wish to enhance its opportunities for hearing the student voice by ensuring student representation on revalidation panels and by inviting students for discussion of curriculum delivery, following the example of the IQAs. Otherwise, the review team was able to verify that generally the University makes

appropriate and satisfactory use of external participation in the validation of programmes, IQAs and revalidations, but was not able to form a view from the validation and review documentation presented of how the University consults with industry and employers for programme validation.

2.3.4   The review team considers it **advisable** that the University review the academic effectiveness of revalidation events at which a large number and/or diverse range of programmes are considered.

2.4   External examining

2.4.1   The University has comprehensive codes of practice for the external examining of undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision as well as postgraduate research students. These codes of practice provide an effective framework for the nomination, appointment and monitoring of external examiners, including detailed procedures for the external assessment of Welsh medium provision. The review team confirmed that procedures and formal systems for the management of external examining arrangements are in place, including the consideration of external examiner reports through the annual programme review and development plans, with heads of school providing written feedback to each external examiner. The institution supports the principle of communicating to students the main elements of external examiners' reports, but accepts that this has not always been common practice, with a new initiative being planned within schools.

2.4.2   Annual oversight is achieved through the direct receipt of all reports by the Vice-Chancellor, as well as a one-page synopsis of reports by Academic Registry. A more detailed analysis is considered by QAVTG, leading to action plans for schools as well as an overview summary for the TLTG. Longer-term analysis of major themes and issues emerging from external examiner commentary and subsequent action planning at school and programme level is achieved through the IQA process.

2.4.3   The review team concluded that the process for reviewing and analysing external examiner observations at task group level is critical and detailed, with clear and accountable procedures and systems in place for appropriate action planning within academic programmes. There appears, however, to be inconsistent systematic reflection or evaluation of external examiner feedback by schools or colleges, and the team considers it **desirable** that the University consider how further reflection on external examiner reports can take place at school or college level.

2.5   Assessment

2.5.1   The University Senate defines and monitors policies and regulations for the assessment of students, including assessment principles, information, feedback on coursework, attendance, examinations, reassessment, progression, and the role of the Board of Studies as a Board of Examiners. These are supported by sustained enhancement projects for assessment and feedback.

2.5.2   The review team noted that the University has advanced procedures in place for assessment through the medium of Welsh, including the clear definition of student responsibilities and the use of external examiners. The University is also developing guidelines for the higher education sector for the appropriate use of translation procedures and Welsh language expertise. This proactive approach to Welsh medium operations has much potential for future good practice, through the University's engagement with the emerging Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

2.5.3   The review team also noted that the University, especially through its analysis of external examiner feedback and periodic internal quality audits, is aware of inconsistencies in the use of assessment procedures across schools. Examples of successful action in resolving difficulties include the provision of assessment criteria, the use of learning outcomes, and double marking.

2.5.4   The review team noted, however, that slower progress has been experienced for other aspects of assessment, including the introduction of categorical marking, the prompt return of coursework, and providing opportunities to students for accessing information about assessed examination scripts. The student submission, some IQAs, reviews of external examiner reports, and policy revision statements by the University have underlined the need to improve consistency of practice in the use of anonymous assessment, as well as the importance of avoiding confusion when unfair practice policies are communicated to students. The team considers it **desirable** that the University expedite the adoption of its requirements for consistency of assessment practice.

2.5.5   The report of the last Institutional Review recommended that the University reviewed 'the approach to viva voce examinations in assessment to establish and secure consistency in the criteria for the use of such examinations'. Appropriate amendments have been made to the University's codes of practice, regulations and guidance, and the review team considered that these now provide clear guidance on the use of viva voce examinations.

2.6   Management information

2.6.1   The review team was able to confirm that the University makes effective use of management information to inform its quality assurance, planning and resourcing processes and to facilitate systematic and comprehensive analysis of retention and achievement. The University has recognised the need for more meaningful year-on-year retention data that differentiates between students who drop out and those who fail to progress.

2.6.2   The University uses a statistical tool - ARQUE (Assessment Report on the Quality of University Examinations) - which provides detailed information on student performance in each module. Summary reports are considered at the QAVTG, where the reports are sent to colleges. There is also a requirement to analyse these statistics at both module and course annual monitoring. However, the extent to which the data was used to provoke analysis and reflection varied across programmes and its use was often limited to descriptive summaries.

2.7   Conclusion

2.7.1   The review team concluded that the University's procedures for programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review are generally sound and was satisfied that the University meets the requirements of external bodies, responds appropriately, and that central oversight of arrangements is assured.

2.7.2   In the light of the evidence considered, the review team found that the University was operating with appropriate regard to the Quality Code, and formed the view that **confidence** can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards. However, the team draws the University's attention to the recommendations made in paragraphs 2.3.2, 2.4.3 and 2.5.4.

3 Quality of learning opportunities

3.1 Student representation

3.1.1 Student representation at an institutional level is generally limited to a Students' Union officer on some of the committees and task groups, although where they do attend they appear to have a crucial role. While the University benefits tremendously from its close relationship with the Students' Union, there seems to be a limited rationale for the lack of representation on some task groups and committees and there are varying levels of engagement with student representation across the institution.

3.1.2 The newly established Code of Practice for Student Representation describes a robust course representation system and rules for student representation on boards of studies. However, staff in schools do not always place enough emphasis on the importance of having representation at other school committees or ensuring that the timing of meetings allows for student attendance. While some schools emphasise the role of student representatives in feeding back staff responses to issues or improvements within a school, there is a lack of school-specific training and this can lead to inconsistent messages. The University is also dependent on the Students' Union to communicate institutional change to students in many areas, and there seems to be a lack of university-wide student communication by the University.

3.1.3 The team learned that while students attended IQAs, and generally the recommendations that reflected student opinion were taken on board by the relevant school, they were only invited to some revalidation events - generally those involving professional and statutory bodies. The team considers it would be **desirable** for the University to review arrangements for school and college revalidation meetings to enhance student engagement with them (see paragraph 1.3.8).

3.1.4 The team found that the arrangements for collecting feedback from students who are not representatives are relatively consistent through the use of module evaluation forms. Students' views are taken seriously and changes are made as a result of their feedback. There is no formal training given, though staff in many schools try to be approachable and students are positive about the openness of staff. However, there is sometimes limited feedback to students to make them aware of the changes that have been instigated, which is often reliant on student word of mouth. Action to expedite the introduction of measures in response to feedback is necessary, though this does happen to a limited extent in some schools already.

3.1.5 Some schools have established strong links with employers through Employer Advisory Boards, and others are being advised to create them. The team learned that graduate feedback is rarely used, although alumni groups are growing stronger and anecdotally staff hear that graduates give positive information to prospective students with whom they come into contact.

3.2 Research-informed teaching

3.2.1 Although research-informed teaching is not an explicitly stated priority within the University's Strategic Plan, the review team confirmed that the University actively pursues such an agenda in order to provide high-quality learning opportunities for students. This includes the Academy of Teaching Fellows, career pathways for academics based on the provision of high-quality learning opportunities for students, and a series of regional Higher Education Academy (HEA) conferences extending to collaborative partners. A strategy for developing research-informed teaching, with shared staff development and research engagement targets between Bangor and Aberystwyth Universities, reinforces this principle.

The review team recognised the explicit linking of a research culture with teaching through the prominent theme of nexus within the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education programme.

3.2.2   Evidence provided by undergraduate and postgraduate students did not show any detailed and explicit recognition of the research-informed teaching agenda. The review team noted, however, that their external examiners provided frequent and positive commentary about high-quality student project work and dissertation performance linked to research.

3.2.3   The University has achieved substantial peer-reviewed output for research-informed teaching through the publication of numerous articles and papers exploring the links between teaching and research in a wide range of disciplines, including explicit discussion of the HEA nexus. There is, however, no central repository for all relevant publications from schools and colleges.

3.2.4   There is no institution-wide working definition of pedagogical scholarship as a key activity related to research and teaching. The boundaries between research and scholarship are therefore blurred at a time when the University is promoting the integration of research, scholarship and teaching as a key part of its mission. The team therefore considers it **desirable** that the University should be encouraged to continue to develop and disseminate criteria for the definition of scholarship, building on the recently agreed promotion pathways for teaching staff.

3.2.5   The review team noted that sustained integration of research with teaching practice and the provision of high-quality learning opportunities is achieved by the Miles Dyslexia Centre within the School of Psychology. This Centre provides support for all University students associated with dyslexia, while also engaging in support for the teaching professions and pursuing an international research agenda. The pioneering work of the Miles Dyslexia Centre was therefore noted by the review team as a **feature of good practice**.

3.3   Resources

3.3.1   The team was able to conclude that there was adequate institutional overview of resources, including the library, archives, computing, media, and reprographics facilities and services. Arrangements for new resource requirements are discussed annually by the New Course Scrutiny Committee. Students who met the review team stated that there were adequate resources for their programmes of study. While students at Coleg Menai were able to access the University's resources at Bangor, students at Coleg Llandrillo are currently not able to do so; but the team understood that there were plans to enable access from the start of the next academic year.

3.3.2   The review team learned that library resources have been devolved from colleges to schools. The University's Library and Archives Task Group is undertaking a review of library provision with the aim of ensuring that a more equitable service is provided for students throughout their programmes of study. The team noted that IT provision scores consistently well in the National Student Survey.

3.4   Student support

3.4.1   The University has developed a comprehensive Code of Practice for Pastoral Support, which appeared to be well understood by academic and support staff. Undergraduate students are required to have a personal tutor. However, although there are back-up mechanisms for students who are not able to contact their personal tutors, students themselves have to invoke these, which can lead to instances where students see their

personal tutors less frequently or not at all. There is no exact stipulation of the nature or quality of pastoral care for postgraduate taught and research students. Students on placement are able to access personal tutors, and Welsh speakers can choose a Welsh speaking personal tutor. Additional academic support for students on collaborative provision is provided through the provision of a link University tutor.

3.4.2   Reliance is largely placed on the Students' Union to communicate University improvements. A key development - the Student Experience Enhancement Strategy - is being solely communicated to students via a Students' Union poster. This issue is likely to be addressed with the development of the online '360 portal', although the timeframe for the completion of this project is unclear. The Strategy's Operational Plan sets out enhancement areas for the next three years, and when completed it can be expected to offer students an increased and consistent amount of support which could lead to good practice within the sector.

3.4.3   The Student Charter, which for many Welsh universities is their central student experience document, is given comparatively little recognition. It combines content from a number of other documents and is something that will be made available to students, although at present there appears to be insufficient communication and awareness of the Charter among students and staff.

3.4.4   Central student support generally is described positively by students, with especial reference to the Miles Dyslexia Centre, described as providing 'a brilliant service' (see paragraph 3.2.5). This service, along with that of the disability access centre, is heavily advertised during open days and seems to be one of the reasons that students choose to attend the institution. Students following programmes through distance learning confirmed their satisfaction with support and resources.

3.4.5   The University's Peer Guide Scheme provides an excellent introduction to student life at Bangor University, and is used consistently. The guidance, which is about student life, the University and the town, begins for the majority of students before they arrive in Bangor. This includes the use of social networks, and is seen to have a significant impact on the settling-in process, with relationships being developed and maintained for as long as necessary. The Scheme has been expanded to include international and postgraduate students, with international students using telephone or email to resolve any questions before they arrive. Training is provided for peer guides, and annual evaluations note increases in the number of peer guides and an improvement in the service they provide. The team concluded that the Peer Guide Scheme provides an excellent introduction to student life at Bangor University and is a **feature of good practice**.

3.5   Appeals and complaints

3.5.1   The information provided on the website is a good introduction to policies, but students are expected to be able to understand the forms and procedures without extra guidance. The awareness of procedures is inconsistent across schools, although most students questioned were aware that they would find information about procedures in their handbooks; this was, however, inconsistent and the review team considered that this issue should be addressed.

3.6   Staff appointment and development

3.6.1   The team learnt that all staff were clear about the appointments and promotion processes. The University has a range of policies and procedures for staff support and staff development, including a Teaching Fellowships Scheme to recognise outstanding contributions to teaching, student learning and pastoral care of students. Staff development

needs are discussed during an annual Performance Development Review process and an overview report is produced by the head of each school for the Human Resources Task Group. All newly appointed staff are allocated a mentor, with the University being actively involved in the Women in Universities Mentoring Scheme. A number of staff development activities are offered in Welsh. The University has a comprehensive web page providing information about provision, and has a Learning and Development Directory that provides an overview of all the opportunities available to staff.

3.6.2   The Academic Development Unit (ADU) promotes and supports practitioner research into higher education. All teaching staff with less than three years of continuous higher education teaching experience are required to undertake the Postgraduate Certificate of Education in Higher Education. A more formal code of practice for postgraduate students who teach is being developed. Peer observation of teaching is practised in all schools and every member of staff is observed once a year.

3.6.3   The team was able to confirm the effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for staff support and development in relation to academic staff engaged in teaching.

3.7   Conclusion

3.7.1   The review team concluded that **confidence** can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. The University's attention is drawn to the team's recommendations in paragraph 3.1.3, relating to a review of its committee/task structure with a particular focus on the location of a comprehensive annual quality assurance and enhancement agenda, and the recommendations in paragraph 3.2.4.

4   Collaborative arrangements

4.1   Introduction

4.1.1   The University has adopted a definition of collaborative provision that includes practice placements in such areas as health and social work. The definition includes articulation arrangements but excludes pathway or progression agreements. The criterion governing the distinction is whether a partnership entails the assignment of a University award or credit for the completion of the programme offered by the partner organisation. The team considered that this distinction reflects the care that is being taken by the University at a time when it is contemplating an expansion of its portfolio of collaborative provision.

4.1.2   The Strategic Plan commits the University to developing 'research and teaching collaborations across the world' while 'working actively with partner institutions throughout the North and Mid Wales region'. Activities within the region include the establishment of a major partnership with Aberystwyth University and the validation of a wide range of Foundation Degree and honours degree programmes offered by Coleg Llandrillo.

4.2   Management of collaborative provision

4.2.1   Some rationalisation of the University's partnerships followed IQA in 2009, including the termination of a number of partnerships in the area of theology and religious studies. This review was commendable for its rigorous use of the *Code of practice*. Partnerships within the region are driven, to a significant degree, by the initiatives of the Welsh Government. The future development of the University's overseas partnerships is to be guided by its recently approved International Education Strategy, which proposes the development of transnational provision through either a validating or franchising model, the

continuing negotiation of articulation and dual degree arrangements, and the creation of an International Partnership Development Office.

4.2.2   The team concluded that the Executive is taking appropriate action to ensure that the portfolio of collaborative provision is developed in a strategic manner and that effective arrangements will be in place for the management of partnerships. In its discussions with staff, however, the team encountered some uncertainty about the nature of the University's development priorities. The team was assured that staff understanding of the University's strategies is being enhanced through the recent production of the College Internationalisation Strategies, the annual review of these strategies, and the creation of small management groups for each of the University's international markets.

4.2.3   The IQA report had also commented favourably on the centralisation of 'some aspects' of the management of the University's collaborative provision, and in September 2011 the University amalgamated two scrutiny groups to form the Educational Partnership Strategy Group. The Group's terms of reference confer upon it responsibility for both the approval and the monitoring and evaluation of partnerships. Senior staff informed the team that the expansion of the University's portfolio of collaborative provision would be governed by rigorous due diligence and robust quality assurance, ensuring central oversight by the External Partnership Scrutiny Group.

4.3   Monitoring of collaborative provision

4.3.1   Responsibility for the monitoring and periodic review of collaborative provision has lain hitherto with schools and with the QAVTG, which has drawn largely upon the information provided by QA1 and external examiner summary reports. These are focused mainly on matters of procedural compliance, containing little substantive information relating specifically to a school's collaborative provision. The task group also considers the IQA reports that are prepared every five years for each school, and these demonstrate due regard to issues arising from a school's management of its collaborative provision. However, the monitoring information that is routinely available to schools varies according to the type of partnership. In the case of the University's two remaining franchises, schools are required to establish joint boards of studies, although the relationship between these joint boards and the school boards of studies remains undefined, with no provision for student membership of joint boards.

4.3.2   Students have reported that their contact with the staff of the University has been limited. The team noted that the 2009 IQA of franchised and collaborative provision had also reported with commendable frankness on the variable quality of schools' communications with their partner organisations, a lack of 'ownership' on the part of some schools, and the inadequacy of their monitoring of curriculum delivery and assessment. The team agreed with the University's view that there is scope for improvement in its communications with its franchise partners, and also noted that there is no provision for student representation of joint programme boards. With the exception of the moderators of validated programmes, schools are not required to appoint staff with responsibilities for liaison with their partner organisations.

4.3.3   The team concluded, therefore, that in the context of reviewing the constitutions, accountability and operation of groups and committees (see paragraph 1.3.6) the University should review the accountability and membership of joint boards of studies. Furthermore, the University should consider how it might enhance the quality of the information that a school, and thus the wider University, routinely obtains on the quality and standards of its collaborative provision.

4.4   Conclusion

4.4.1   The review team found that, overall, the University has a sound framework for its collaborative arrangements and that it operates with appropriate regard to the Quality Code, but draws the attention of the University to comments in paragraphs 4.3.2. and 4.3.3.

5   Quality enhancement

5.1   The University adopts the QAA definition of enhancement as deliberate action at institutional level for improving the quality of learning opportunities. This has been developed through a clearly defined Enhancement Strategy, followed by the inclusion of enhancement within the current teaching and learning strategy that is shared with Aberystwyth University.

5.2   Eight university projects have been completed with outcomes including the development of a retention strategy, student support, the design of Welsh medium curriculum areas, an audit of the internationalisation of the curriculum (leading to an Internationalisation Strategy for the University), and new or revised codes of practice for pastoral care, employability and placement learning, and assessment. More recent projects have included the Student Experience Enhancement Strategy, graduate attributes, assessment and feedback, and recognising teaching excellence. There are also examples of projects and initiatives that have led to large-scale and sustained improvements in learning opportunities throughout the University. They include the peer guide scheme for helping new entrants, and the Bangor Employability Award for undergraduate students.

5.3   The review team in particular noted the pioneering work of Canolfan Bedwyr. This Centre features within institutional strategy for the provision of enhanced learning opportunities for Welsh language learners as well as Welsh medium undergraduates. It is research-active at national and international levels, securing representation on the Welsh Language Partnership Council for Wales in order to develop policy and planning, with recognition by the Institute of Welsh Affairs and the Welsh Government. It has further developed a new Welsh language skills certificate on behalf of Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol as well as developing Welsh medium work placement opportunities with local employers - including the promotion of bilingual workplaces through the Cymorth Cymraeg website. The review team considered Canolfan Bedwyr to be a **feature of good practice** through the deliberate action being taken at institutional level to enhance Welsh language and Welsh medium provision.

5.4   Evidence is available that detailed discussion of enhancement takes place within the School Teaching and Learning Committees and within task groups, as well as systematic action planning at module and programmes levels. The University has recognised the need for more coherent and consistent dissemination of enhancement project outcomes. The review team agreed with this insight, while also noting the success of the institution with some initiatives that have led to action planning in all colleges or schools. Generally the team found it difficult to identify consistent and rigorous evaluation of enhancement activity associated with the work of support centre operations working across the University. In the context of evaluation activity for enhancement, the team therefore considers that it would be **desirable** for the University to be encouraged to consider introducing systematic evaluation of its academic support provision.

Conclusion

5.5   Subject to the review team's comments above, the University was found to be actively engaging the departments and faculties in the implementation of its agenda to enhance the student experience. On the basis of this evidence, the review team noted that the University has succeeded in taking deliberate steps to encourage, develop and embed

the enhancement of learning opportunities within the University, with ownership by staff in schools, students, and task groups. The University's attention is drawn to the team's recommendations in paragraphs 3.2.4 and 5.4.

6 Arrangements for postgraduate students

6.1 Environment and governance

6.1.1   The University complies with the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and this is reinforced by a revised and comprehensive set of regulations that bring together five separate guidelines and codes. The review team confirmed that the University provides and oversees appropriate policies and procedures that ensure high standards and high-quality learning opportunities for postgraduate research students.

6.1.2   The review team noted the University's systematic and regular analysis of Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) feedback, providing supportive information about student satisfaction with research facilities and resources; a point reinforced through review meetings with students and staff. The institutional ambition for supporting growing numbers of research students through the all-Wales Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarships (KESS) programme - linking research student activities with a wide range of workplaces and employers - was also evident in documentation and planning. Other research initiatives enhancing the research environment include close connections with Aberystwyth University and Canolfan Bedwyr. The team concludes that the University is succeeding with the provision of a high-quality environment for its research students. There is much potential for this to be reinforced further through expansion of the Beyond Boundaries conference organised by the Postgraduate Forum, although the review team noted the disappointment of postgraduate students with the postponement of this year's event.

6.1.3   The University is developing a Graduate School programme in order to improve provision of research student support through shared responsibility and improved working with larger cohorts, including international students. The review team noted slow progress with this initiative on occasions, but welcomes the recent appointment of a Director in order to provide more coherence and impetus for this initiative throughout the University.

6.2 Admissions, induction and support

6.2.1   The University has structures and procedures in place for admissions processed centrally by the Academic Registry, with colleges having dedicated admissions staff. An innovative Postgraduate Ambassadors pilot scheme is emerging for induction, based on the University's established peer guide operation for undergraduate support. A proactive approach is evident for potential accommodation difficulties and induction arrangements for 'late arrivals' - especially international research students.

6.2.2   Comprehensive detailed information is provided through the online generic handbook for research students and supervisors, which also provides signposting to other key documents and policies including unfair practice, complaints, and appeals procedures. Some schools also provide handbook information for specific research communities, although this is not standard practice. The review team encourages the University to consider the provision of more detailed information through the new Graduate School programme.

6.2.3   The Directors of Postgraduate Studies within schools oversee training development programmes for research students. The review team noted positive feedback from research

students for the impressive array and quality of courses, which can be chosen from a suite of modules coordinated by the Academic Development Unit as part of its Graduate Skills and Early Researcher Development Programme. The team also noted that the University offers accredited outcomes through the Postgraduate Skills Development Award, which includes use of the online Training Needs Analysis and Professional Development Planner as well as discipline-specific training via the schools.

6.2.4   The review team recognised the University's awareness of concerns about variable practice with regard to the arrangements and policies for supporting postgraduate students who teach and assess, and welcomed the progress that has been made by the institution in formulating guidelines and policies in order to clarify workloads, training requirements, and teaching contracts. The University states that all postgraduate research students will have a personal tutor who is additional to the supervisor, although there is little clarification within school handbooks about arrangements for personal tutoring support. The team noted through discussions within review meetings that the Director of Postgraduate Studies provided an alternative point of contact to the supervisor in cases where there may be personal difficulties, although this role could be clarified further in information provided to research students.

6.2.5   The team further noted that while each school and the University is required to consider progression and interview data for research students as part of periodic internal quality audits, such reflection appears to be overly brief compared with the more dominant analysis of undergraduate and taught postgraduate experiences.

6.3   Supervision

6.3.1   The review team noted that staff development opportunities are provided via ADU for supervisors through dedicated training workshops. Supervisors do not normally supervise the equivalent of more than six full-time PhDs at the same time, and the institution states that meetings between supervisors and research students should be scheduled on a regular basis, although the amount of time allocated to meetings appears to vary between supervision committees and across schools. The University might want to consider providing more guidance for supervisors and their research students.

6.3.2   There are well defined and rigorous procedures for the monitoring of postgraduate research students by supervisory committees and Senate, although the review team noted that the institution is aware of instances where the quality and frequency of information from schools could be improved. While supervisors are alerted to missing reports, there appears to be no systematic procedure for rapid follow-up at school level. The University should be encouraged to explore methods for ensuring that where there is incomplete information, the supply of monitoring updates becomes standard practice in order to identify potential difficulties or support requirements. The review team further welcomed the planned launch in September 2012 of an electronic system alerting supervisory committees of reporting deadlines.

6.4   Conclusion

6.4.1   Overall the review team found that the University has a sound framework for its arrangement for postgraduate research students. The research environment and postgraduate research experience fully meet the Expectations of the Quality Code. The team noted the work of Canolfan Bedwyr (see paragraph 5.3) at postgraduate as well as undergraduate level and the ambassador scheme based on the Peer Guides scheme (see paragraph 3.4.5) already cited as **features of good practice**.

7 Public information

7.1 The review team found that the University has procedures in place to check the accuracy of published information (and that of its collaborative partners). All students are issued with a student handbook containing essential information, but the team noted inconsistency across colleges and schools in the full range of information given. For example, some student handbooks lack information about anonymous marking, the student representation system or marking criteria. The team considers it **advisable** that the University ensures that consistently accurate information is given in student handbooks.

7.2 Similarly the team noted inconsistencies in the information provided on the University's web pages including those advertising courses and schools to prospective students. While much of the information is clearly referenced, some refers to evidence that is outdated and irrelevant. In some cases, information is not always referenced on every relevant web page and this could be misleading for prospective students. The team considers it **advisable** that the University takes steps to ensure the accuracy and currency of information for prospective students throughout the University's website.

Conclusion

7.3 The review team found that overall the information published by the University in relation to its provision is accurate, comprehensive and reliable. The University has a published Welsh Language Scheme and complies with the Welsh Language Act 1993. However, the team draws the University's attention to the recommendations in paragraphs 7.1.1 and 7.1.2.

Annex A: About Bangor University

Bangor University (the University) opened (as the 'University College of North Wales') in October 1884. Funds were raised by public appeal to establish a college of university rank in Bangor, and an important feature of its foundation was the voluntary contributions made by local working men and women from their weekly wages. The College became a founding member of the federal University of Wales in 1893, and from that date offered University of Wales degrees.

In 2007, the University received its own taught and research degree-awarding powers and 'university title' (as 'Bangor University') following a QAA review, which coincided with the QAA Institutional Review published in 2007. These powers were held in abeyance until the University Council took the decision to begin awarding Bangor University degrees from October 2009.

In the 1950s and 1960s, many new areas of study were introduced including oceanography, psychology, linguistics and sociology. However, during the 1980s funding restrictions led to a far-reaching rationalisation of the subjects offered in Bangor, and several departments (such as physics, philosophy and classics) were closed. Two local colleges amalgamated with the University: St Mary's College (1976) and Coleg Normal (1996). These were both essentially teacher-training colleges, although Coleg Normal had diversified over the years. In addition, previously independent colleges of nursing, midwifery and radiography joined the University in the early 1990s.

In 2010-11, the University had approximately 9,200 full-time students, and a further 1,980 part-time students. Approximately 43 per cent of students are from Wales, 13.5 per cent are from overseas and the remainder are from the rest of the UK and Europe. The University employs approximately 2,233 staff (full-time and part-time). It has a strong commitment to the Welsh language and operates in a bilingual environment that offers translation facilities at its committees and task groups. Some 1,795 students and 918 staff describe themselves as fluent in Welsh.

The University currently has 23 academic schools, grouped into six colleges for administrative and resource purposes, together with a number of research centres within colleges, and a small number of interdisciplinary research institutes that fall outside the departmental structure. The University offers over 450 undergraduate degree programmes (honours and joint honours) and over 120 taught postgraduate and research programmes.

Mission and strategic plan

The University's Mission states that 'Bangor University will be a leading research-led University with an international reputation for teaching and research, that fosters the intellectual and personal development of its students and staff, provides a supportive multicultural environment, promotes widening access and inclusiveness, and supports the economic, social and cultural well-being of Wales and the wider community it serves. Bangor University will be recognised regionally, nationally and internationally as a centre of excellence for a varied portfolio of academic programmes and for the high quality of the experience it provides for its students and staff.' The current Strategic Plan sets out the main aims and objectives of the University based around a number of key priority themes, summarised as: access to excellent teaching and learning; delivery of a high-quality student experience; strengthening the quality and quantity of research and enterprise; playing a leading role in Welsh language and culture, both locally and nationally; and positioning itself as a global University with a reputation for sustainability and partnership with institutions in Wales, to deliver 'For our Future'.

Among a number of strategies developed to support this plan are a Student Experience Enhancement Strategy and an International Education Strategy formulated to emphasise the international dimension of the University's mission. These strategies are planned to help develop the next generation of international entrepreneurs, scientists, leaders and so on, and to prepare learners for the international market. The University is collaborating with Cardiff and Swansea Universities, and with the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board for North Wales, to develop Medical Education in North Wales. It also runs a Strategic Health Alliance for Research and Education project (SHARE) with Cardiff University.

A central department, Canolfan Bedwyr, was formed to promote and support the institution's Welsh medium teaching provision, to facilitate the use of the Welsh language within the institution's administration and, generally, to act as a catalyst in developing Bangor University as a centre of excellence in Welsh medium education and Welsh language services. This is an important part of the University's strategy. The department has subsequently won national and international acclaim, not only for its innovative work in developing and promoting Bangor University's use of the Welsh language, but also for its work in facilitating the use of Welsh in the wider world. The University takes a highly active role in the recently established Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (Welsh National College), a company formed by the HE sector in Wales with Welsh Government support, to increase and broaden Welsh medium higher education.

The University has responded to the higher education policies of the Welsh Government and its agenda for restructuring higher education, and is committed, with Aberystwyth University, to strengthening the 'Aber-Bangor Partnership' through a new Strategic Alliance. This aims to explore the potential for greater collaboration in teaching and learning, research and enterprise, and shared services. As part of its collaborative provision, the University has also developed a strategic partnership with Coleg Llandrillo. This has led to a number of existing and new programmes in Llandrillo being validated by Bangor University (previously validation had been carried out by the University of Wales) and the branding of a 'University Centre' at Coleg Llandrillo.

The University has responded to HEFCW's call for regional plans focusing on geographical access, clearer progression routes, and a higher degree of responsiveness to local needs through the development of CADARN ('Collaborating And Developing Across Regional Networks') in conjunction with Aberystwyth, Glyndŵr, the Open University and Coleg Llandrillo, though it also encompasses all other FE colleges in the region. CADARN reviews provision in the region and highlights proposals for new provision, for widening access, for increased employer engagement, and for the sharing of certain services.

Annex B: Response from Bangor University

Bangor University welcomes the outcome of the Institutional Review and the judgements that confidence can be placed in the soundness of our current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards, and that confidence can be placed in the soundness of our current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

The University appreciates the detailed level of scrutiny undertaken, and the rigour with which the review was carried out.

We accept the findings and recommendations set out in the Report, and have already begun to implement them.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Many terms also have formal 'operational definitions'. More information can be found in the Handbook for Institutional Review: Wales, available on our website at: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/Pages/Institutional-review.aspx.

If you require formal 'operational definitions' of other terms please refer to the **assuring standards and quality** section of our website: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx.

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

Academic Infrastructure Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

academic management framework The structure in place at an institution for managing academic standards and quality.

academic quality A comprehensive term referring to how, and how well, institutions manage teaching and learning opportunities to help students progress and succeed.

academic standards The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

assessment criteria The knowledge, understanding and skills that markers expect a student to display in an assessment task, and which are taken into account in marking the work. These criteria are based on the intended learning outcomes.

assessment regulations The rules governing assessment of a programme of study including the marking scheme, the pass mark, the requirements for progression to subsequent levels or stages of a programme and the award and classification requirements (for instance credits to be achieved and specific marks to be attained).

Code of practice The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

collaborative provision A term to describe how institutions work together to provide higher education, including learning opportunities, student support, and assessment, resulting in a qualification from one or more awarding institutions.

confidence judgement A judgement by a QAA review team in Institutional Review that 'confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of an institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards and/or of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students' (two separate judgements for standards and

learning opportunities). Alternatively, the team might express 'limited confidence' or 'no confidence' in these issues.

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.

distance learning A course or unit 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'.

enhancement Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

external examiner An independent expert appointed by an institution to comment on student achievement in relation to established **academic standards** and to look at approaches to assessment.

external examining The process by which one or more independent experts (**external examiners**) comment on student achievement in relation to established **academic standards** and on the institution's approach to assessment, thus helping to ensure consistent standards and fair assessment procedures across the UK.

feature of good practice A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

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 an institution'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.

Institutional Review A method of review used by QAA to assure the standards and quality of higher education. In this publication it denotes the quality assurance process applicable to Welsh institutions.

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

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

learning support Personal support and other facilities and systems that are put in place to assist students in their learning.

moderation A process intended to assure that an assessment outcome is fair and reliable and that assessment criteria have been applied consistently.

module A self-contained, formally structured unit of study, with a coherent and explicit set of **learning outcomes** and **assessment criteria**. Some institutions use the word **'course'** to refer to individual modules.

operational definition A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

professional, statutory and regulatory bodies Organisations that set the benchmark standards for, and regulate the standards of entry into, particular profession(s) and are authorised to accredit, approve or recognise specific programmes leading to the relevant professional qualification(s) - for which they may have a statutory or regulatory responsibility.

programme (of study) An approved course of study which 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 being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements, along with additional topics and overarching themes.

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.

threshold academic standard The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

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