



Aberystwyth University

Institutional Review by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

June 2012

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About this review

This is a report of a standard provision Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Aberystwyth 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 30 April to 4 May 2012 and was conducted by a team of six reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Christopher Alder
- Professor Peter Bush
- Dr Kathryn Gillen
- Professor Jethro Newton
- Mr Daniel Bowen (student reviewer)
- Ms Rachel Lucas (review secretary).

The review was coordinated by Professor Peter Hodson, Assistant Director in the Reviews Group. To arrive at its conclusions, the review team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education (including collaborative provision) provided by Aberystwyth 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 standards¹
 - the quality of learning opportunities
- provides commentaries on public information
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice.

A summary of the [key findings](#) can be found in the section starting on page 3. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.² For background information about Aberystwyth University see [Annex A](#). 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

Amended judgement

The report on the Institutional Review of Aberystwyth University was published in June 2012.

Since that date the review team can now confirm that the institution, working in partnership with the student body, has satisfactorily addressed the review team's initial recommendations through the action planning process. In particular, those recommendations which led to the initial judgment of 'limited confidence' in the soundness of the provider's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards in collaborative provision have been satisfactorily addressed as follows.

The recommendation required the institution to review and improve the management of the University's collaborative arrangements. The review team was clear that the best interests of both students and collaborative partners would be served by the action taken by the University, which includes:

- establishing a Collaborative Provision and Partnerships Committee
- establishing terms of reference based on sector best practice
- implementing clear lines of authority for authorisation of activity
- creating a register of all activity
- auditing all Memoranda of Understanding to determine accuracy and 'active status'
- introducing a Franchise Handbook
- correcting website information and introducing periodic checks of partners' websites
- implementing standard templates for all collaborative agreements.

Other recommendations made by the review team did not contribute to the judgement of 'limited confidence', but these have also been addressed. The Council of Aberystwyth University has approved and signed off the action plan as complete.

The judgement is now formally amended to indicate that the review team confirms that, as of June 2013, there can be **confidence** in the soundness of the provider's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards in collaborative provision, and the review can be considered to be signed off as complete.

Key findings

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

QAA's judgements about Aberystwyth University

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

- **Confidence** can be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.
- **Limited confidence** can be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards in collaborative provision.
- **Confidence** can be placed in the soundness of the 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 Aberystwyth University.

Advisable

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

- review the approval process for distance learning provision, paying due regard to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* (paragraph 1.1.6)
- provide central oversight of the impact of accumulative change on programmes (paragraph 2.1.2)
- review the complexity of rules, regulations and programme structures to ensure greater equity of the student experience (paragraph 2.2.4)
- develop and publish a comprehensive register of collaborative partnership activities (paragraph 4.2.2)
- provide and implement a comprehensive procedural guide for collaborative partnership provision (paragraph 4.3.2)
- ensure that programme specifications published on the web are complete and current (paragraph 7.1.2)
- ensure that accurate information is published by both the University and its partners about collaborative provision (paragraph 7.1.3).

Desirable

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

- implement regular reviews of the admissions policy (paragraph 1.2.2)
- ensure all learning outcomes appropriately reflect *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)* (paragraph 1.2.3)

- make better use of management information data to monitor student performance (paragraph 2.4.2).

Features of good practice

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

- The integrated approach of senior academic managers to reduce inconsistencies in the student learning experience (paragraph 1.1.4).
- The dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching, especially technology-enhanced learning (paragraph 3.1.3).
- The strong links in academic departments between research, teaching and student learning (paragraph 3.2.2).
- The commitment to recognising and rewarding excellence in teaching (paragraph 3.3.3).
- The development and support available to academic staff (paragraph 3.3.5).
- The support and development available to postgraduate research students (paragraph 6.2.1).

Detailed findings about Aberystwyth 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 Committee and managerial structure

1.1.1 Senate is the ultimate academic authority of the University and is supported by 11 committees: Academic Affairs Committee (AAC), Research Degrees Board, Rules and Regulations Committee, Academic Progress Committee, Recruitment Committee, Student Support Services Committee, Widening Participation Committee, and the three Faculty Boards. Senate maintains oversight of the student experience through the faculties, which receive reports from departmental learning and teaching committees.

1.1.2 The committee framework is complemented by a senior management structure, which is led by the Vice-Chancellor who chairs Senate, and is supported by four Pro Vice-Chancellors who between them chair AAC, the Research Degrees Board, and the Student Support Services and Widening Participation Committees. The University allows for student representatives on all of the University's major committees. Within the departments, staff-student consultative committees are in place for students to raise concerns. The outcomes of these consultative committees are reported to departmental boards or learning and teaching committees.

1.1.3 Each faculty has a dean and, working together through the Deans' Office, the deans have a central role in the maintenance of quality and standards. Faculties report directly to Senate, and the deans, as Chairs of the Faculties, also report to AAC on quality matters. The University also has a Dean of Postgraduate Studies who has a cross-institutional role for research matters. Administrative oversight of quality assurance is provided by the Academic Secretary.

1.1.4 The review team noted that the Deans' Office had achieved a developing role in addressing areas of inconsistency within and between faculties. The team saw evidence that the deans, working with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Chair of AAC) and the Academic Secretary, were improving the consistency of the student learning experience across the institution. The team considered that the integrated approach of senior academic managers to reduce inconsistencies in the student learning experience was a **feature of good practice**.

1.1.5 The University clearly documents its procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of its higher education provision and these apply to all programmes, no matter what their mode of delivery. The review team saw a number of internal programme approvals and departmental reviews, and confirms that external experts are used at module and programme approval and in departmental review.

⁴ www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx

⁵ See note 3.

1.1.6 The University currently operates 10 Flexible Distance Learning (FDL) programmes from its Department of Information Studies, and four FDL programmes from its Department of Law and Criminology. At the time of the review visit, 900 students were enrolled across the 14 programmes. Approval and monitoring of distance learning follows University standard procedures. The review team found that no additional information is required for the approval of distance learning provision and that distance learning approval processes did not always include consideration of the specific learning resource and student support requirements of distance learners, including: the security and reliability of the delivery system; the appropriateness of e-learning methods; and the quality of study materials. While the team considered that on the basis of the evidence seen the routine operation of FDL was working, it nonetheless considers it **advisable** that the University review the approval process for distance learning provision, paying due regard to the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

1.2 Use of the Academic Infrastructure

1.2.1 The University states it actively uses the Academic Infrastructure as an external reference point and that changes to the *Code of practice* are considered by the relevant department, academic or service, on advice from the Academic Office.

1.2.2 The review team saw that the University has started to address the new Quality Code, and noted that AAC has asked the Academic Office and the deans to consider external examining procedures in light of the revised Quality Code. In relation to the current *Code of practice* the team found that engagement may not have been systematic. In addition to the need to revisit practice in relation to the *Code of practice, Section 2* (see paragraph 1.1.6), the team was unable to find evidence of regular monitoring of the admission policy to ensure that it took place in accordance with the regulatory framework. From 2010 some attention had been paid to revising the admissions policy for students with disabilities, but at the time of the review an updated version of the policy was not available. In the light of the evidence available to it, the team considers it **desirable** that the University implement a regular review of the admissions policy.

1.2.3 The review team found that subject benchmarks play a significant role in informing programme design and approval. External examiners are also required to report on programme engagement with relevant benchmarks in their annual report to the University. After sampling a range of module descriptors and considering discussions on progression through levels within programmes, the team concluded that it would be **desirable** for the institution to ensure all learning outcomes reflect the FHEQ appropriately.

1.2.4 The review team found that the University publishes programme specifications on its website and provides a proforma for use by staff. While those seen by the team in connection with programme approval were complete, that was not always the case for those published online (see paragraph 7.1.2).

1.3 Conclusion

1.3.1 In the light of the evidence considered, the review team was able to confirm that the University makes appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure. However, the team draws the University's attention to the recommendations made in paragraphs 1.1.6, 1.2.2 and 1.2.3 in relation to the regular review of the admissions policy, the approval and review of distance learning provision, and ensuring that learning outcomes reflect more fully the expectation of programme progression and level as expressed in the FHEQ.

1.3.2 The team also established that the University has mapped its processes against the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education's *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*.

2 Academic standards

2.1 Effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

2.1.1 The University has a range of methods for securing the standards of its awards. External experts advise on programmes as they are developed and approved. The process of approval includes the production of a programme specification, which details broad content, the assessment strategy and the learning outcomes of the award. The programme specifications are published on the University website. This process of developing and approving programmes establishes the standards of the University's awards.

2.1.2 The University's approach to programme monitoring is particularly rigorous and includes detailed consideration of individual modules. The same process applied to programme monitoring of the University's collaborative provision. The review team noted that annual monitoring could lead to considerable updating and changes to modules and programmes at departmental level. However, the team found no evidence of a mechanism to evaluate the overall effect of multiple small changes to modules and programme structures. The team therefore considers it **advisable** that the University put systems in place to provide central oversight of the impact of accumulative change on programmes.

2.2 Assessment

2.2.1 Progression and award rules for undergraduate degrees are common across faculties. The regulations have been mapped against the *Code of practice*. They are also clearly referenced against the FHEQ and Credit Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW), and reflect the requirements of the professional, statutory and regulatory bodies with whom the University interacts. The University's Quality Handbook includes a statement of assessment policy outlining the roles and responsibilities of various bodies with respect to assessment activity, including procedures, returning assessed work and feedback. Implementation of these rules and policies is determined at departmental level.

2.2.2 The review team noted that programme structures for academic and intellectual progression through a programme varied across departments, with some adopting a structure where level of study correlates with year of study, and others a structure where students progress from level 4 in their first year of study to level 6 in their second and third years. The team found that, in some cases, this structure is refined further, with some level 6 modules only available to students in a specific year of study. The team noted that students on a joint honours programme could experience both these types of programme structure.

2.2.3 The review team identified that differing departmental practice has led to problems in implementing progression rules designed to ensure that graduating students have achieved the learning outcomes appropriate to both the level and specific requirements of a given award. The team also noted that the details of assessment practices and procedures provided to students by departments varied significantly, and students on joint honours programmes become aware of the different assessment rules applied to them as they continue their programme of study.

2.2.4 While the University has recognised that progression regulations continue to require simplification, the review team consider it **advisable** that the University review the

complexity of rules, regulations and programme structures to ensure greater equity of the student experience.

2.3 External examiners

2.3.1 When a programme has been approved, the maintenance of that programme's standards is monitored by external examiners and through the annual monitoring process.

2.3.2 External examiners for taught programmes are asked to confirm proper standards of both awards and student attainment. They are also given the opportunity to address responses to previous matters of concern, comment on academic content with respect to external reference points, and identify good practice. Their reports are circulated to the Vice-Chancellor, faculty offices and heads of department. Summary external examiners' reports are compiled for consideration at faculty for subsequent report to AAC. Student representatives are able to see external examiner reports via their membership on faculty committees and AAC.

2.3.3 Based on the evidence available, the review team formed the view that the University makes sound use of its external examiners in ensuring the maintenance of the standards of its awards and the proper processing of its examination procedures.

2.4 Management information

2.4.1 In addition to feedback from external examiners, both the annual monitoring process and the departmental review include consideration of statistical data. Senate receives detailed admissions reports to guide recruitment policy, and the National Student Survey is considered widely from departmental level committees up to Senate.

2.4.2 The review team concluded that systematic use was being made by the University of management information, in particular to inform recruitment, planning and the student experience. However, given the potential of the University's management information system, the team considered that there were opportunities to improve the annual monitoring of student achievement. The team considers it would be **desirable** for the University to make better use of management information data to monitor student performance.

2.5 Conclusion

2.5.1 The review team found that the University was operating with appropriate regard for the *Code of practice*, 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 4.2.2 and 4.3.2, which led the team to conclude that **limited confidence** can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards in collaborative provision.

3 Quality of learning opportunities

3.1 Effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

3.1.1 The allocation of learning resources is managed by the University's Senior Management Team in discussion with the Planning Office. The Planning Office ensures that resources are allocated in line with the University's strategic aims. At University level, Information Services (IS) is the focus of delivery of information services across all University campuses, including to FDL students. Targeting of investment in library resources is managed between IS and IS representatives in academic departments.

3.1.2 The e-learning support team provides technical and pedagogical support to staff and students in the use of new technologies for learning. The Aberystwyth Learning and Teaching Online (ALTO) Steering Group, established in 2005, provides a staff forum for the exchange of information on the use of learning technologies in learning and teaching, and reports to AAC. A web resource is provided for the sharing of good practice and this is supplemented by regular staff development events to discuss emerging good practice in learning and teaching.

3.1.3 Clear guidance on accessing and using electronic resources is provided to both staff and students, and ALTO recently introduced the BlackBoard required minimum presence to ensure more consistency in the use of this virtual learning environment. The review team learned that the initiatives introduced as a result of the Enhancing Learning and Teaching through Technology (GWELLA) project, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), had been fully embedded and continued to be resourced by the University. In the light of all the evidence available, the team concluded that the dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching, especially technology-enhanced learning, was a **feature of good practice**.

3.2 Research-informed teaching

3.2.1 The University believes that research-led teaching is embedded in all programmes. The principal responsibility for research-informed teaching is devolved to departments, which are overseen by faculties. Procedurally, the approval forms for new modules and programmes include specific questions about research-informed teaching. Structurally, each department has a Director of Learning and Teaching, a role that includes ensuring research informs the teaching within the department. Sharing of good practice is encouraged via the Learning and Teaching Forum, convened and chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning, Teaching and Employability). The University's Centre for the Development of Staff and Academic Practice (CDSAP) also provides valuable support and encouragement for the delivery of research-led teaching. The review team noted that in addition to its broad remit for assisting centrally in the implementation of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, CDSAP facilitates the Aberystwyth Learning and Teaching Enhancement Fund scheme, and organises the Annual Learning and Teaching Colloquium at which outcomes of research-informed teaching projects are reported.

3.2.2 The review team found that although the University did not systematically monitor the impact of research on teaching, students recognised that the curriculum they study and the teaching they receive is informed by research. The review team found evidence that specialist modules taught and delivered at levels 5 and 6 of a programme, but particularly in the final year of study, carry an expectation that they will be based around research and staff research interests, as do project supervision arrangements. The team concluded that the strong links in academic departments between research, teaching and student learning was a **feature of good practice**.

3.3 Staff development

3.3.1 A recent review of promotion processes led to the establishment of criteria for the promotion of academic staff based on demonstrable excellence in teaching. In addition, the University's new Learning, Teaching and Widening Access joint strategy with Bangor University indicates an intention to build on the existing system for developing and rewarding good teaching, and link these to Higher Education Academy (HEA) accreditation and the National Teaching Fellowships.

3.3.2 The University's commitment to continuing professional development in support of enhancement of quality and standards is exemplified in the activities and programmes of

CDSAP, and in the work undertaken by the Learning and Teaching Coordinator, who manages professional development for teaching staff.

3.3.3 The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Fund, administered by CDSAP, provides an annual opportunity for staff to bid for funding for small-scale learning and teaching projects, while the annual Teaching Excellence Award scheme enables several successful teachers to be rewarded each year on the basis of demonstrating critical reflection on their academic practice. A parallel award scheme is in place to reward postgraduate teaching assistants. A further scheme enables academic staff who have completed their probation to apply for an Aberystwyth University Learning and Teaching Fellowship, for the furtherance of their learning and teaching development, an opportunity that can assist a member of staff in seeking advancement to Senior Lecturer. Student-Led Teaching Awards are due to be introduced in 2012-13 through the Student Guild, to be funded by the University. The team concluded that the commitment to recognising and rewarding excellence in teaching was a **feature of good practice**.

3.3.4 Academic staff in their first post, and those who have not completed probation elsewhere, are appointed subject to a three-year probationary period, and must complete the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education (PGCTHE), part of which is separately accredited by the HEA. Probationary academic staff are allocated a mentor who supports the probationer on the PGCTHE and observes them teaching on at least two occasions in their first year. The University's Peer Observation of Teaching is an annual requirement for staff active in teaching at all levels.

3.3.5 Academic staff who are seeking promotion have access to a mentor to help with this process. The team concluded that the development and support available to academic staff was a **feature of good practice**.

3.4 Conclusion

3.4.1 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.

4 Collaborative arrangements

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The University currently offers three higher education programmes through collaborative arrangements with UK partners and listed eight articulation arrangements with international partners. The review team learned that the University has no separate collaborative strategy. It has recently approved an International Strategy 2011-16.

4.1.2 Oversight of collaborative partnerships in Wales is provided by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Participation and Collaboration), with oversight of international partnerships the responsibility of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research, Engagement and International), advised by the Director of the International Office.

4.2 Approval of partners

4.2.1 The review team noted that AAC receives an annual listing of collaborative provision, which currently comprises Welsh institutions. Following an audit undertaken by the International Office, AAC had also received details of eight overseas institutions with which the University has articulation or progression arrangements. The team noted that AAC additionally received a lengthy listing of the University's relationships with international institutions, including those established for research links and/or student exchanges.

The various listings were inconsistent in providing information on dates of the establishment and reviews of the partnerships and provided no indication of the numbers of students involved.

4.2.2 The review team learned that all programme-centred collaborative activities, including articulation and progression arrangements, were governed by Memoranda of Agreement signed by the Vice-Chancellor. However, the team noted the memoranda relating to international partners were varied in structure and nature, and were reported as being translations of Chinese versions which had been developed over time. Some of the memoranda were signed by the Vice-Chancellor and the President of the partner, while others were unsigned and undated, some were signed retrospectively and another was signed by a Head of Department. Some of the memoranda indicated the duration of the agreement; others did not. The University subsequently stated that these were 'merely offered as examples of ongoing work', a position that did not add clarity for the team. The team also found inconsistency in relation to the collaborative arrangements with Welsh institutions, with one franchise arrangement, as presented to the team, appearing to be governed by an unsigned and undated Memorandum of Cooperation. Subsequent to the review, the University has assured the team that a signed version of this Memorandum is on record. On the basis of the evidence available, the team considers it **advisable** that the University develop and publish a comprehensive register of collaborative partnership activities.

4.3 Monitoring and review in collaborative provision

4.3.1 The University considers that the mechanisms for assuring the quality and standards of collaborative provision are integrated with those in place for University provision. The review team noted that the University's Quality Handbook made no specific reference to collaborative activity, nor did there appear to the team to be any published guide to staff on the selection, establishment and quality assurance of collaborative educational partnerships. The team formed the view that the procedures necessary for the quality assurance of collaborative provision were not well understood. In relation to one collaborative arrangement in Wales, the team noted that the University required that the operation of the collaborative provision be reported to the relevant faculty via the annual monitoring process and reapproved via the Departmental Review process. The team saw evidence of the collaborative provision annual monitoring at programme level and concluded that the admissions, learning opportunities and standards achieved by students in this arrangement were secure. There was also some evidence in the Dean's report to faculty that this collaborative programme was operating successfully. However, the team could find no evidence of the operation of the franchise being reported in the previous three years of faculty minutes, nor could the team find a formal decision to continue the franchise in any of the documentation for the relevant Departmental Review. In the absence of a collaborative policy, it was clear to the team that monitoring of this collaborative provision was only undertaken at programme level, and no oversight of the partnership was available at institutional level. The team concluded that it was not possible for AAC or Senate to form a view on the effectiveness of the operation of this franchise, which involved up to 35 students per year, nor had either body been invited to approve the formal continuation of the arrangement.

4.3.2 The review team understood that the University's collaborative provision was small in scale and that the main focus of future international partnerships was on research, knowledge transfer and staff/student exchanges. However, given the University's potentially developing collaborative profile in Wales, and the desire to develop and increase international progression arrangements, the team concluded that the University needed to reflect on the robustness of the existing arrangements. The team considers it **advisable** that

the University provide and implement a comprehensive procedural guide for collaborative partnership provision.

4.4 Conclusion

4.4.1 The review team found that, overall, the University does not have a sound framework for the management of its collaborative arrangements and that it is not operating with appropriate regard to the *Code of practice*. The review team concluded that, on the balance of the evidence available to it, **limited confidence** can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards in collaborative provision.

5 Quality enhancement

5.1.1 The University believes that it is at the forefront of enhancing the learning and teaching environment in Wales, and it aims to deliver excellent teaching in a supportive learning environment. The University's current Learning and Teaching Strategy includes an emphasis on improving the learning and teaching infrastructure, and promoting and rewarding excellence and innovation in learning and teaching. Oversight of enhancement is provided by AAC, which monitors the Learning and Teaching Strategy and will monitor the joint Learning and Teaching Strategy (2012-14) that the University has developed with Bangor University.

5.1.2 The formal structures that support the University's approach to enhancement include a prominent role for deans, who maintain an overview of quality enhancement at faculty level, reporting on enhancement and learning and teaching issues by referring them upwards to AAC. The review team heard that deans meet with departments, as required, to discuss progress on department learning and teaching enhancement priorities and their alignment with institutional enhancement agendas. Faculty Board minutes indicate regular discussion of department and institutional enhancement matters.

5.1.3 Departments, through their heads, play a key role in the delivery and implementation of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, and are supported in this by their Director of Learning and Teaching and the departmental Learning and Teaching Committees. The review team noted that the Directors of Learning and Teaching seemed to be effective in raising university-level priorities at departmental level. It was also apparent to the review team that department Learning and Teaching Committees communicate with staff-student consultative committees on matters raised elsewhere in the University, or by staff-student consultative committees themselves.

5.2 Conclusion

5.2.1 The review team found that the University was actively engaging the departments and faculties in the implementation of its agenda to enhance the student experience.

6 Arrangements for postgraduate students

6.1.1 The strategic and executive management responsibility for research matters rests with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research, Engagement, and International). Responsibility for the management and central operational oversight of postgraduate affairs, in particular research training and monitoring, resides with the Dean and Deputy Dean of Postgraduate Studies.

6.1.2 The University operates a system of cross-faculty Research Monitoring Committees, which report to the Research Degrees Board, a sub-committee of Senate.

Research Monitoring Committees are responsible for ensuring that departments, through their Postgraduate Affairs Committees, undertake effective monitoring of postgraduate students' progress and that regular reports are made on such matters to Research Monitoring Committees. The Research Degrees Board has overall responsibility for the quality and standard of research degree programmes and the student experience, and exercises oversight of research degree candidatures from registration to examination. The review team concluded that the reporting mechanisms and structures in place ensure that the University has clear oversight of its research degree students.

6.1.3 The review team noted that there is a common, centrally organised induction programme for all new postgraduate research students, at which students' development needs are assessed. Each student is provided with a copy of the Research Training Handbook containing information on induction and the availability of centrally provided modules and workshops. This is complemented at department level by induction meetings arranged by the lead supervisor. Supervision commences in the student's first week, and the norm is for supervision meetings to be held on a fortnightly basis. The activities of supervision teams are informed by cross-department procedures. All postgraduate research students receive, on admission, a copy of the Code of Practice for Research Postgraduates, which provides detail on the expectations and responsibilities of student and supervisor.

6.1.4 The review team explored arrangements made for those postgraduate research students employed by their department to undertake teaching duties, including demonstration activities, as Graduate Teaching Assistants. The team learned that all Graduate Teaching Assistants are required to complete training for the role.

6.2 Conclusion

6.2.1 Overall, the review team found that the University has a sound framework for its arrangements for postgraduate students. The research environment and postgraduate research experience fully meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The review team concluded that the support and development available to postgraduate students is a **feature of good practice**.

7 Public information

7.1.1 The review team found that the University has procedures in place to check the accuracy of published information, and that it evaluates the effectiveness of its public information through routine student feedback. The University has established e-resources for prospective and current students in relation to modules, study schemes and programme schemes. Students are also issued with departmental handbooks containing specific information, which are reviewed annually by the departments and periodically as part of the Programme and Departmental Review process. The team noted that most students found the information provided accurate and helpful.

7.1.2 The University publishes programme specifications on its website. However, the review team found that the published programme specifications are not all complete and therefore considers it **advisable** that the University ensure that programme specifications published on the web are complete and current.

7.1.3 In relation to collaborative provision, the team noted that the information provided by the University on its website in relation to its collaborative relationships was incomplete, and that the information provided by its partners was also sometimes unclear. The team considers it **advisable** that the University ensure that accurate information is published by both the University and its partners about collaborative provision.

7.1.4 HEFCW has issued guidance on the full publication of course costs. The review team noted that course costs are included in the current prospectus and can be accessed via the Student Charter.

7.2 Conclusion

7.2.1 The review team found that the information published by the University in relation to its home provision is generally 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 7.1.2 and 7.1.3.

Annex A: About Aberystwyth University

Aberystwyth University (the University) was established in 1872. It was granted a Royal Charter in 1889 and became a founding member of the University of Wales (UoW) in 1893, in whose name it then offered degrees, having previously awarded external degrees of the University of London. It opened the first UK hall of residence for female students in 1895 and pioneered the teaching of some disciplines new to universities, notably International Politics in 1919 and Welsh History in 1931. The University received its own taught and research degree awarding powers in 2007 (which it held in abeyance until 2010) following a QAA review in 2005-06, which coincided with the QAA Institutional Review report published in 2007. Since 2009, all students admitted to the University have been registered for Aberystwyth University rather than UoW awards following the University's withdrawal from UoW. The University is currently located on four sites: Penglais, Llanbadarn, various buildings in Aberystwyth town centre, and a research base at Gogerddan. The Estates Strategy envisages a concentration of teaching at Penglais.

In 2011-12 the University had some 9,000 full-time students, comprising 8,050 undergraduate, 590 postgraduate taught and 270 research students. There were in addition 2,610 part-time students, including 860 who studied via distance learning, and a further 2,700 students following further education courses in Welsh for Adults offered in conjunction with partners. There were some 665 full-time equivalent non-home/EU students, and this figure comprises 539 full-time and 270 part-time students, of which 387 are postgraduates. The first-year full-time home/EU student population was the largest in the University's history, and the University has put in place arrangements to control future intakes at around the HEFCW control number for 2012-13, and to increase the student population by targeting recruitment resource on postgraduate and international students. The University has a particularly strong commitment to the Welsh language and operates in a bilingual environment that offers translation facilities at major committees. Some 1,000 full-time students and 380 staff define themselves as fluent in Welsh.

The revised institutional funding arrangements in Wales and the developing higher education policies of the Welsh Government are causing the University to review its student profile and to reconfigure some of its relationships with Welsh higher education institutions and further education colleges. Of particular note is the Strategic Alliance between Aberystwyth and Bangor Universities, a response in part to the Welsh Government's drive for greater collaboration among universities in Wales. This relationship, which aims to share good practice, is expressed primarily through common strategies for learning and teaching and widening access. At the same time, the UK Government's immigration policies and the increased fee level for students at universities in England are likely to impact on the University's student recruitment plans.

The University has limited collaborative provision. This involves joint work with Bangor University in teacher training (through the joint establishment of a single centre for Initial Teacher Training provision in North and Mid-Wales, and a Postgraduate Certificate in Translation); franchise provision with Coleg Sir Gâr; Welsh for Adults with further education colleges in Mid-Wales; and progression/articulation arrangements with a number of international partners.

The current Strategic Plan runs to 2013 and identifies the University's mission as continuing 'to be an internationally competitive teaching and research university which addresses global challenges and is responsive to the needs of the local community, of Wales and of the wider world'. However, a new 2012-17 plan is in development and the University is engaged in a strategic review that has involved a structured consultative process with students, staff, the University Council and other stakeholders to realign the plan 'with the University's ambitions for the next five years'.

The University currently operates through 17 academic departments or institutes, responsible largely for teaching, research and resource management. These are grouped into three dean-led faculties (Arts, Science and Social Sciences) with responsibility primarily for academic quality assurance. There are 27 service departments supporting these areas and students and staff more generally.

Annex B: Response from Aberystwyth University

Aberystwyth University welcomes the confidence expressed by the QAA in both the likely and future management of the academic standards of its awards, and in the current and future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to our students. We are particularly delighted that so many features of the good practice, which underpin our consistently excellent performance in national and international measures of undergraduate and postgraduate student satisfaction have been recognised; in particular the strength of our research led teaching, our support and development of postgraduate students, our active dissemination of good learning and teaching practice and our determined commitment to recognise and reward excellence in teaching and to the professional development and support of our academic staff.

We take seriously the limited confidence judgement reached in respect of the lack of formal management processes of our extremely limited range of collaborative provision and have moved swiftly to address this by adopting and enforcing best practice from the sector. We look forward to demonstrating that the university has established appropriate management of our small number of articulation agreements. A Collaborative Provision and Partnership committee has been established, under the chairmanship of Professor John Grattan, Pro Vice Chancellor, which will ensure this.

We value the engagement of the QAA with the university in their role as critical friends and the recommendations of the review team will guide us in the year ahead as we revise our quality assurance and enhancement activities to ensure that we remain responsive to the needs of our students and continue to deliver a first class learning and teaching experience.

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 *Institutional Review (Wales) Handbook*, 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* published by QAA: 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 opportunities. 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. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

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).

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.

RG 944 09/12

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ISBN 978 1 84979 595 1

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk.

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786