Quality Enhancement Review of Bangor University

Technical Report

May 2018

Contents

This report is published in both English and Welsh.

About the Quality Enhancement Review method

The QAA website explains the method for [Quality Enhancement Review (QER)](#) and has links to the QER handbook and other informative documents.[1] You can also find more information about the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).](#)[2]

About this review

This is the Technical Report of the QER conducted by QAA at Bangor University. This was a pilot review under QAA's new Quality Enhancement Review method. The review took place as follows: First Team Visit on 23 April 2018 and Review Visit on 21-24 May 2018. The review was conducted by a team of four reviewers:

- Professor John Baldock
- Claire Blanchard
- Professor John Feather
- Rhys Jenkins (student reviewer).

In advance of the review visits, the University submitted a self-evaluative document (the Self-evaluative Analysis), a Change Report, and a Prior Information Pack, comprising a range of materials about the University's arrangements for managing quality and academic standards.

About this report

QAA reviews are evidence-based processes. Review judgements result from the documents review teams see, the meetings they hold, and drawing upon their experience as peer reviewers and student reviewers.

In this report, the QER team makes judgements on:

- the requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) Part 1 for internal quality assurance
- the relevant baseline regulatory requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework in Wales.

The judgements can be found on page 2, followed by the detailed findings of the review given in numbered paragraphs.

Technical Reports set out the QER team's view under each of the report headings. A shorter Outcome Report sets out the main findings of the QER for a wider audience. The [Outcome Report](#) for this review is on the QAA website.[3]

QER Technical Reports are intended primarily for the provider reviewed, and to provide an information base for the production of thematic reports that identify findings across several providers.

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[1] About QER: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/quality-enhancement-review](#).
[2] About QAA: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](#).
[3] Outcome Report: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/Bangor-University](#)

Overarching judgement about Bangor University

Based on the information presented, the review team judges that:

- Bangor University **meets** the requirements of the ESG Part 1 for internal quality assurance.
- Bangor University **meets** the relevant baseline regulatory requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales.

This is a positive judgement, which means the University has robust arrangements for securing academic standards, managing academic quality and for enhancing the quality of the student experience.

Statement on enhancement

The University's approach to enhancing the student learning experience is effective, student-led and student-focused. The University provided ample examples of enhancement at university, college, school and programme-level.

1 Contextual information about the provider, student population and the review

1.1 Summary information about the provider, including strategic framework and organisational structure

1   The University was founded in 1884 as the University College of North Wales, which went on to become a founding member of the federal University of Wales in 1893. The University was granted taught and research degree awarding powers in 2007 and has awarded Bangor University degrees since 2009.

2   Bangor University's mission is to be a 'strong, confident institution recognised regionally, nationally and internationally as a centre of excellence for its varied portfolio of teaching and research, and for the unique, multicultural, inclusive experience it provides for its staff and students'.

3   Its Strategic Plan 2015-20 has four principle priorities:

- an excellent education and student experience
- enhancing research success
- an international university for the region
- Welsh language, culture and civic engagement.

The development of the Strategic Plan was followed by a planning round with each academic college and school to plan their contribution to key priorities and agree appropriate trends with reference to benchmarking.

4   The University's Council is responsible for its strategic direction and oversight, and its Executive body leads on institutional management, supported by a number of task groups. As set out in Ordinances, the University's Senate is the University's academic authority, supported by several sub-committees, such as those for examining, research degrees and regulations.

5   The University is currently reconfiguring its college and school structure from 22 schools across five colleges to 13 schools across three colleges. The new structure will be in place in August 2018 and will comprise the College of Arts, Humanities and Business, the College of Human Sciences, and the College of Environmental Sciences and Engineering.

1.2 Composition, key trends and anticipated changes in the student population, including information on retention, progression and outcomes

6   The University has approximately 9,500 full-time students and 1,600 part-time students. The number of full-time students has increased in the last five years; the number of part-time students has been in decline in line with national trends, notwithstanding growth in the University's part-time postgraduate student numbers. The University employs 2,122 staff, 1,250 on a full-time basis. In 2016-17, the University's students comprised 34 per cent from Wales, 45 per cent from the rest of the UK, 17 per cent from overseas (non-EU) and 4 per cent from other EU countries. It expects to see continued growth in overseas students driven by the establishment of an embedded college.

7   Since 2015, the University has taken action to respond to variable retention rates across the University. This involved exploring practice across schools and colleges and support for them from the University's Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT). For some schools this involved developing and implementing retention strategies. The CELT has also showcased good practice in enhancing retention rates at its

annual conference. After a pilot in one academic school, the University rolled out the bringing forward of resits from August to July to better meet the needs of students at risk of withdrawing between academic years. It has used learning analytics to identify students that are under-engaging in their programmes due to low attendance and target support for them appropriately. Finally, an interruption to study service counsels students who are considering withdrawing and identifies support that may help them continue their studies. Since 2012-13, the University has seen a decline in its non-continuation rates as recorded in HESA data.

8   The University's entry tariffs are above the sector median but its proportion of good degrees (1sts/2:1s) has remained below the sector median in the last three years but are increasing. This may be in response to a number of steps the University has taken, including identifying which schools were most discrepant in performing below the sector benchmark for the award of good degrees and using programme and module attainment data to identify and address potential problems where there are particular low distributions of marks, with tailored support from CELT. The University's work in this area as one of its enhancement themes is ongoing.

1.3   Commentary on how the provider supports national priorities

9   The University takes steps to address a number of national priorities through the development and delivery of Fee and Access Plans submitted to HEFCW for approval and reported on elsewhere. The implementation of Fee and Access Plans enables the University to demonstrate that it is promoting fair access to higher education, including to under-represented groups, raising educational aspirations and improving the experience of those from such groups through high quality academic and welfare support, increasing the retention of students from low participation neighbourhoods, looked after children, care leavers and carers, and supporting the progress of students from such groups into employment. Since 2014-15, the University has performed above the sector and Wales benchmark for the recruitment of students from low participation neighbourhoods; it enrols more students in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance than the sector average.

10   The University has a longstanding and high-level strategic commitment to the Welsh language and culture expressed in its Strategic Plan. Data from 2014-15 showed that the University taught 42 per cent of Welsh medium higher education students in Wales across the broadest range of subjects. The range of Welsh medium provision supports the national objective to double the number of people competent in the use of Welsh. The University's Welsh medium provision in subjects that lead to public service professions, such as social work and in healthcare supports other public bodies in meeting the standards placed upon them to provide services in the medium of Welsh. The University has an established record of research in Welsh and on the Welsh language that informs national Welsh medium policy development. It also supports the development of technologies that facilitate the extension of Welsh medium education and service.

11   The University has adopted the sustainability principles expressed in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and its Strategic Plan commits to becoming a 'Sustainable University', fostering 'a culture that values and promotes sustainability'. The University's pursuit of this aim is led by a Sustainability Lab; the University also works with other Welsh Universities through a Higher Education Wales Well-being of Future Generations Group to share practice.

1.4   Commentary on the preparation for the review, including how the provider and students worked in partnership in review preparation

12   The University's preparations for review were led by an Institutional Review Task Group with membership from Pro Vice-Chancellors, the Quality Assurance and Validation

Unit, and other leading University managers responsible for the student experience. The Group's terms of reference required members to critically reflect on quality assurance processes and procedures. In addition, the University has held training events for staff to explain their role in review, and held joint meetings between the Task Group and other Task Groups to engage widely with staff and students and enable the contribution to the self-evaluation.

13   The University involved students in its preparation for the review through the Students' Union President's membership of the Institutional Review Task Group, and their informal meetings with the University on the content of the University's Self-evaluative Analysis. The Students' Union held briefings for its Course Representative Council and focus groups to discuss and inform reflections in the Self-evaluative Analysis.

14   Finally, the University provided drafts of the Self-evaluative Analysis and the Change Report to its Council, noting its significant interest in the Change Report which provided Council with detail on how the University met many of the baseline regulatory requirements.

1.5   Brief summary of the nature and rationale for the particular areas of focus of the review and in the self-evaluation

15   The University asked the review to consider the four aims of the Student-led Teaching and Learning Strategy as its areas of focus. These aims are Student Engagement, Curriculum Development, Assessment and Feedback, and Student Outcomes and Retention. The idea for the strategy came from students, and its development was led by students with support from, and in partnership with, the University.

16   Welsh medium provision was chosen as an area of focus because of both its strengths and strategic significance. Finally, the University asked the review to consider the developments in employability and postgraduate research provision since they were both areas the University wished to improve and where they had identified challenges. These areas of focus are discussed in other sections of this report.

1.6   Summary of the provider's follow-up to the previous review

17   The University's response to recommendations from its QAA review in 2012 were evaluated by QAA in a Mid-process Student-Focused Engagement in June 2015. In response to previous advisable recommendations from QAA, the University has reviewed the constitutions, accountability and operation of its groups and committees to secure the oversight of academic provision by Senate which receives minutes from a range of task groups including those covering learning, teaching, and quality assurance. It has reviewed the academic effectiveness of revalidation events at which a large number and/or diverse range of programmes were originally considered. In response, it adjusted revalidation events so they focus only on a limited number of courses, distinguishing between them. The University uses validation and revalidation events to ensure that all programmes are aligned with relevant subject benchmarks. It has arrangements to ensure that consistently accurate information is given in student handbooks. Finally, it has secured the accuracy and currency of information for prospective students throughout the University's website by identifying information owners, engaging them in the annual monitoring of the information for which they are responsible, overseen by an Information Oversight Group (IOG). Additionally, the IOG monitors information on an ongoing basis and conducts spot checks.

18   In response to desirable recommendations from its QAA review in 2012, the University has ensured further reflection on external examiners' reports at school and college levels by requiring them to be evaluated by school and college boards. It expedited

the adoption of its requirements for consistency of assessment practice by issuing guidance for staff and reviewing progression arrangements. As noted in this report, it has further responded with the implementation of a new Assessment Framework. The University developed and disseminated criteria for the definition of scholarship, building on recently agreed promotion pathways for teaching staff and revised its human resources policies and procedures accordingly. It reviewed arrangements for meetings of school and college committees to enhance student engagement with them and issued new guidance to schools and colleges. Finally, the University has introduced systematic evaluation of its academic support provision by using several external audits; advice and support services use that Matrix quality framework involving an external review.

1.7 The provider's responsibilities for the higher education it provides on behalf of the degree-awarding body/ies it works with

19   The University collaborates with a number of other bodies and awarding organisations to offer joint degrees, Doctoral Training Partnerships, franchised and validated programmes, joint and dual awards, an embedded college, articulation arrangements, placements, and study abroad opportunities. It offers higher education at other campuses, principally in Wrexham and at Bangor College China, the latter in partnership with the Central South University of Forestry and Technology.

20   The University lists several key partners including the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, MDIS in Singapore and Uzbekistan, the Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance, the University of Bologna, and Oxford International Education Group.

2 Enhancing the student learning experience

2.1 Strategic approach to enhancing the student experience

21   The University's approach to enhancing the student experience is governed by its Student Experience Strategy. The first strategy was created in 2011 and was implemented through an operational plan overseen by a joint University and Students' Union steering group. Having deemed the aim of partnership working with students as successfully embedded (see section 2.2), the University launched the current Student Experience Strategy, which emphasises the recognition of the needs of the diverse student body. Its strategic aims are prioritising student engagement, delivering an excellent postgraduate experience, leading innovation for the Welsh language, developing an inclusive curriculum, creating employable graduates, building an inclusive community, developing student-centred facilities, and supporting the local community. Some of these aims have formed the areas of focus in this review which are addressed throughout this report. Specific outcomes produced by the current strategy are described in a 2016 Progress Report that formalises the monitoring and implementation of the strategy. The University recognises that such a wide-reaching strategy with a large number of people involved in its implementation is difficult to monitor. The current strategy is due to end this academic year, which has provided an opportunity to review implementation going forward. The University intends to continue its strategic approach to enhancing the student experience through the University's annual Fee and Access Plans and the Student-Led Teaching and Learning Strategy.

22   The University has provided examples of how this strategic approach works effectively in practice. To enhance its approach to working in partnership with students, it has implemented Student Experience Strategies (see section 3.2). In order to develop the postgraduate experience, the University has, among other things, formed a Doctoral School (see section 3.4). The University has taken steps to enhance the Welsh medium learning experience, for example by increasing the number of modules available through the medium of Welsh (see section 3.7). Graduate employability is an area of focus for this review and has largely been achieved through the creation of the Bangor Employability Hub (see section 3.5). Staff were clearly aware of the Student-Led Teaching and Learning Strategy and the projects being put in place to implement it.

2.2 Approach to working in partnership with students

23   Since the launching of the Student Experience Strategy in 2011, the University has continually sought to embed the concept of students as partners across the University and in all operational aspects. The University has many examples of this concept being truly embedded. One such example is the Student-Led Teaching and Learning Strategy and ongoing implementation. Another example is a 'Together We…' campaign instead of a 'You said, We did' campaign. The University and students considered that the latter created a divide between the University and the students. The 'Together We…' campaign highlights the University's positive and inclusive approach to working with the student body to address student feedback, and its commitment to working with students as partners.

24   Students are involved in the University's quality assurance processes and staff welcome, are impressed with, and evidently value students' involvement. Students are on all major committees of the University and have a positive impact. Course representatives are reflective of the wider student body with specific representatives for certain cohorts such as Welsh medium, international, and disabled students. Students from collaborative providers are also encouraged to be as involved as possible, although it is recognised that there are cultural barriers in some instances. Several of the students that met with the review team were involved in University committees and felt adequately trained. Students reported that they consider the representative system effective at raising and addressing their concerns

and bringing about change. The students also welcome an open-door policy that enables them to discuss concerns at any time with staff. The review team **commends** the extensive and culturally-valued partnership with students, which permeates all facets of University life.

2.3 Recognising and responding to diversity of the student population, including approaches to widening access, the needs of specific groups of students and by mode, level and location of study

25 At a strategic level, the University is committed in its strategic vision to widen access and equality for all students. The University's Strategic Equality Plan sets out the University's objectives and action plan for promoting equality and diversity and preventing discrimination which it monitors through an Equality and Diversity Task Group and reports annually on progress.

26 The University's approach to widening access can be found in the University's 2018-19 Fee and Access Plan which outlines several outreach activities. These activities include continuing to support the Reaching Wider Partnership, working directly with schools and colleges, science engagement activities to encourage more women into science, technology, engineering and maths subjects, events directed at care leavers and those with caring responsibilities, financial bursary support, and work with strategic community, regional and national partnerships such a Grŵp Llandrillo Menai. The University's dedicated Widening Access Centre supports these outreach activities and seeks to raise awareness of issues pertinent to widening access. The Fee and Access Plan also sets out how the University provides high quality academic support and welfare support. The University monitors and provides a detailed report of the widening access work being undertaken and the progress being made in an annual Strategic Planning and Engagement Document. The University has seen an increase in the number of Welsh domiciled students who come from areas of multiple deprivation or Communities First areas (10.4 per cent in 2011-12 to 11.8 per cent in 2016-17) and there is also an increase in the proportion of students from UK low participation areas (27.2 per cent in 2011-12 to 30.7 per cent in 2016-17). The University has received an Athena SWAN Bronze award, as have three of its academic schools.

27 The needs of specific groups of students are met in several ways. The use of learning analytics allows the University to monitor a student, groups of students, modules, or programmes for engagement. The University has developed an in-house and online data interface ('MyBangor') which allows personal tutors to record meeting notes and view students' attendance and their Personal Learning Support Plans where applicable. Academic support is provided through the Study Skills Centre, and the library service provides relevant skills sessions across the University.

28 The University supports students in their development as learners both centrally and at a school and college level. In anticipation of the changes to the UK Government's funding of the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), the University conducted a review of its support for disabled students and restructured in ways which have not compromised the excellent services provided to students. The Disability Service performed well in its DSA Quality Audit and its own student survey found 95 per cent of students are satisfied with the service provision, with 51 per cent rating it as excellent. The University recognises the need to continually develop this provision. Planned enhancements include one-to-one study skill taster sessions, taking on a new non-medical help co-ordinator to streamline processes, and implementing a new administrative system to reduce the workload for tutors allowing them to focus on the support they provide.

29 The University recognises that students from low-income families are less likely to participate in extra-curricular activities due to associated costs. As a result, the University's continued investment ensures that students have free access to all sport clubs, societies,

and volunteering activities in the Students' Union to ensure students face fewer barriers in getting the most from their University experience. The University also continues to grant bursaries for those in need.

30   Welfare support is accessible to all students who need it and the University has implemented a Student Mental Health Strategy overseen by a University-wide working group. Student Services provides online information and guidance to support mental well-being. Appointments with advisors can be made by email and held through videoconferencing, allowing distance learners the ability to access services. For students studying at Wrexham, student support is supplemented through a service agreement with Wrexham Glyndŵr University. The University continues to develop the online material provided by Student Services to further broaden access to services. Moreover, the Student Services provision within the University has achieved accreditation to the Matrix Quality Standard and the Student Services Annual Report confirms positive student feedback.

31   The data shows that the University recognises the diversity of the student population and responds effectively. Both internal and external metrics, such as the National Student Survey, Student Services Audit, DSA Quality Audit and the Matrix Quality Standard, and data from HEFCW, reflect the University's excellent work in this area. Students who have interacted with these services speak very positively about the support and help they receive, which correlates with the evidence and data presented to the review team. The University continues to enhance this provision and improve the student experience for all students.

2.4   Postgraduate taught and research student experience

32   The University treats undergraduate and postgraduate taught students similarly for the purposes of quality assurance and enhancement, arguing that taught programmes are broadly comparable in objective and function, albeit at different levels. It considers the postgraduate research student experience as differing from the taught experience since it is contextualised to be discipline-specific and part of the wider research environment of the University.

33   The team addressed the issue of the relationship between undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision. Postgraduate taught students (including some who had studied for their undergraduate degrees at the University) confirmed a noticeable differentiation between their postgraduate work and their undergraduate work. Students on integrated master's programmes also told the review team that they felt they had made a transition to more complex work, and that they felt well-supported in doing so.

34   Only a minority of postgraduate taught students criticised confusion about access to the VLE at modular level, and noted that a few classes were sometimes too undergraduate-orientated where postgraduate taught and undergraduate students were taught together. The review team also heard, however, that when undergraduate and postgraduate taught students share lectures they have different tutorials to support the achievement of different learning outcomes. These are seen as relatively minor issues, with students clearly expressing the view that they felt fully integrated into their respective schools and that they had a distinct voice. Academic staff also told the review team about effective postgraduate representation within schools.

35   The establishment of the Doctoral School in 2016, led by a Dean of Postgraduate Research, aimed to ensure a distinctive and high quality experience for all postgraduate research students by providing training and by incorporating them fully into the University's research culture while creating a more equitable research experience across schools and colleges. Both staff and students confirmed that progress was being made in achieving this.

The Doctoral School has a cross-University responsibility for training and professional development for postgraduate research students, and the training and development of supervisors. This is being implemented through the provision of induction and training courses in liaison with the schools and colleges. Staff advised that this enhancement of provision and student experience took account of input from external examiners and the adoption for all students of good practice in training and supervision as required by the UK Research Councils for students whom they fund. Students confirmed that they had received appropriate training, and have appropriate facilities, academic and pastoral support for their research. The review team **affirms** the development of the Doctoral School to support a distinct and consistent postgraduate research experience across all schools.

36   The University recognises that in the past the results from postgraduate research student surveys have shown progression and completion rates which are below the UK national average. This issue is also being addressed through the Doctoral School which monitors the establishment and effective use of Supervisory Teams and requires regular reports, including an annual review, from Teams. The review team was told that senior staff are confident that the system is being effectively implemented, and that the Director of Graduate Studies liaises with the College Deans if and when problems arise. The review team considers that the University has the structures and practices to appropriately address these issues. Most students seen by the review team concluded that the Doctoral School represented a positive development although some were not fully aware of the developments.

2.5   Supporting students in their development as learners

37   Continued investment has been made in the Study Skills Support provision at the University. Since the launch of a Study Skills Centre, the range and uptake of the support provided has increased with the majority of service users self-referring. The Centre has an impact on attainment, and has been positive for both students who are high achievers and those at risk of failing. Students also have a number of other opportunities to develop as learners such as the 'Languages for All' scheme and the 'Oral Presentation' scheme of which they are aware.

38   In this review the University has chosen employability provision for students as an area of focus and which was recognised in its 2017 Gold award in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). The north west of Wales has a low proportion of employed graduates in high-skilled jobs compared to many urban regions and the University recognises the challenges this presents. In response, the University has established the Bangor Employability Hub (the Hub) which enables students to identify and focus on the skills and attributes they wish to develop. The Hub can also record evidence of activities students undertake for the purposes of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) and to demonstrate they meet the criteria to qualify for a Bangor Employability Award (BEA) in recognition of extra skills attained. Engagement with the Hub has consistently increased since its launch with 64 per cent of undergraduates engaging with it by the end of 2016-17. The Destination of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) data confirms that the steps taken by the University are commensurate with an improvement in students' graduate employability. Moving forward the University has several initiatives to further embed the Hub within schools and a drive to get students thinking about employability earlier on in their university journey. Students are aware of the BEA and the Hub and could see the direct benefits it would afford them.

2.6   Learning environment provided, including the use of technology

39   The University has undertaken several major investments in the learning environment, in particular Pontio, an arts and innovation centre for both the University and

the local community. The University monitors other smaller-scale projects as governed by the Teaching Facilities sub-Group. A trading room in the Business School and increased social learning and computing space have been developed since the last review.

40   The University has continued to develop learning technology. The web-based software 'MyBangor' enables the University to use learner analytics to monitor the attendance, engagement and attainment of students in order to intervene and respond to students at risk. It acts as a student record system and enables personal tutors to record notes on students. It hosts a new Student Request Centre, which replaces paper-based processes and allows students to complete online forms. These forms include requests for extensions, change of degree, change of name, and extenuating circumstances. It also hosts students' Personal Learning Support Plans. Some students that met with the review team were not aware of the Student Request Centre, but agreed they felt comfortable talking to a personal tutor and would only know of the Request Centre if they had a problem. Students agreed that they found MyBangor useful for finding out grades and to engage with the Bangor Employability Award.

41   The University, like most other institutions, has increased its use of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Students reported that the VLE works well and when there are issues the University responds quickly. Lectures are also recorded via Panopto and stored on the VLE for students to access. According to the NSS survey results regarding adequate IT provision, the University matches or exceeds the sector median, and consistently exceeds the average score in Wales. This is further supported by the University's internal survey in June 2017. The Learning Technology Team and CELT have developed a number of workshops and online support to assist teaching staff in the use of the technology. Staff reported to the review team that they are well supported in the use of technical facilities and in developing their technical skills.

42   The University recognises the benefits in developing its online provision of learning resources which is of particular importance to a small number of distance learners and those that study outside of Bangor. They also recognise the difficulties in providing some academic resources for students who study through the medium of Welsh. Welsh medium students that met with the review team were positive about the provision of materials given the limited volume of academic material published in Welsh. Students representative of all levels and modes of study that met with the review team were satisfied with the provision of resources. This is confirmed by the above sector average result in response to the National Student Survey questions regarding library resources.

2.7   Supporting the Welsh medium student learning experience

43   At a strategic level the University sets out its commitment to Welsh language provision and support for Welsh medium students in their Welsh Language Policy. The University has chosen Welsh medium provision as an area of focus of this review. Since the last review, the University has increased the Welsh medium provision and has succeeded in increasing the numbers of students studying a minimum of 40 credits through the medium of Welsh. In context, this provision is 42 per cent of all Welsh medium higher education provision taught across all Welsh universities. In line with the University's commitment to the Welsh language, several staff who were originally funded through the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol's staffing scheme have been employed directly by the University. The University incentivises students to study through the medium of Welsh with bursaries and by emphasising its value as an employment attribute. Students were aware of such advantages.

44   Notwithstanding limited academic literature in the medium of Welsh, the University provides its own extensive collections and Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol resource portals. It

encourages staff to publish textbooks and resources in Welsh and develop Welsh medium learning resources, some online. Students reported that lecturers are acutely sensitive to the needs of students studying through the medium of Welsh. Several examples were given by students choosing to switch with ease between languages throughout their studies, in terms of actual study and for assessments.

45   It was evident throughout the review, and through the documentation provided, that the Welsh language is embraced and embedded as part of the daily life of the University and stems from a high level strategic commitment. Staff and students throughout, both Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers, spoke very positively of their experience of studying and working in what the review team concludes is a truly bilingual institution. Its bilingualism is evidently of huge benefit to the University and has only a positive impact on the student and staff experience. As a result, the review team **commends** the deeply embedded bilingualism in all aspects of University life which positively impacts on the student experience.

2.8   Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience

46   It is clear to the review team that the University's approach to enhancing the student learning experience is effective, student-led and student-focused. The review team commends the University in two areas and the University provided ample other examples of enhancement at university, college, school and programme-level.

47   The University is cognisant of potential challenges it may face in terms of finance and resources in light of significant national changes such as Brexit. With the examples given and through the conversations the review team had with staff and students, the review team concludes that the University has a very effective and systematic approach to enhancing the student learning experience.

3 Supporting the enhancement of learning and teaching

3.1 Strategic approach to forward planning, including the use of information to identify priorities designed to enhance learning and teaching, and approaches to implementation and evaluation

48 The University systematically utilises a range of data including module evaluations, external examiner reports, reports from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, student survey data, and Assessment Reports on the Quality of University Examinations (ARQUE), which are all discussed and fed into Annual Review and Development Plans to help the University inform its priorities. The University has focused on and improved its performance in a range of metrics including student satisfaction, retention, employability and attainment. The focus of this has resulted in the University successfully attaining a Gold TEF award. The team met with a range of staff from across the University who all confirmed that the University uses information from a wide range of data sources to help evaluate their work and inform its strategic thinking and forward planning so that the University adopts an evidence-based approach to the identification of areas for enhancement.

49 The University's strategic approach to forward planning, including the use of information to identify priorities designed to enhance learning and teaching, and approaches to implementation and evaluation, is set out in several strategies informed by student engagement, particularly in the Student-Led Teaching and Learning Strategy. College Deans participate in the Annual Planning round so subject disciplines inform key strategic decisions. The University uses sector benchmarks to identify areas of poor performance and address them. The review team considers that the use of such a wide source of strategic drivers has been helpful in generating engagement from both staff and students and has resulted in the University's excellent attainment on a number of higher education benchmarks.

3.2 Approaches to managing change in approaches to learning and teaching

50 The review team found that the University uses an evidence-based approach to identifying changes in approaches to teaching and learning which is reliant on key metrics as discussed above. The University has sought to implement change by setting enhancement themes grounded in the institutional data. Engagement with the student body in particular through the Student-Led Teaching and Learning Strategy has been central to this.

51 The University has also adopted an evidence-based approach by using a range of key performance indicators whereby best practice can be identified and areas of concern addressed. The University also assigns a staff member from its Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching to each enhancement theme to enable academics to lead on the initiative and drive change.

52 The Student-Led Teaching and Learning Strategy identifies several key themes which the University is addressing, including assessment and feedback which has resulted in student satisfaction data that substantially exceeds the sector benchmark and is among the best in the UK.

53 Retention is another area where the University has made progress in managing change. It has a range of initiatives specifically targeting programmes which were out of line with the sector in terms of their retention rates and developing actions plans in response. A third area of focus included Student Outcomes which specifically looked at issues of teaching quality and assessment reliability. The final area related to Curriculum

Development whereby the University introduced a new stakeholder-focused Programme Approval Process.

54   The review team considers that the University has been effective in many ways as measured by its outcomes. The team noted that not all enhancement themes are yet fully embedded as the work on retention is still ongoing, however the University's track record of delivering on prior enhancement priorities gives the team confidence in the effectiveness of the enhancement approach.

3.3   Approaches to supporting innovation, identifying and sharing good practice

55   The University is committed to raising the quality of the student learning experience by fostering an institutional culture of recognition and reward for teaching excellence. It does this in a number of ways such as through staff training seminars that present evidence-based ideas in teaching in workshops, peer review of teaching and the annual staff conference. These workshops serve as evidence of staff engagement with continuing professional development (CPD) which informs applications for Higher Education Academy (HEA) Fellowships. At a strategic level, recognition of Fellowships is being integrated into staff professional development reviews (PDR) and are a criterion for teaching-led promotion applications. The University offers a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education to all contracted academic staff. It also offers career-wide professional teacher development, linked to accreditation, which forms part of the promotions framework. These opportunities are also made available to staff at collaborative centres.

56   CELT disseminates good learning and teaching practice through varied modes of engagement which include lunch hour knowledge exchange meetings, online resources workshops and seminars, and share and inspire newsletters. The University holds a CELT conference annually which celebrates teaching across the University. It also uses peer observation of teaching to contribute towards the sharing of good practice. Good practice is shared through the governance structure of the University at both college and school level. There are also opportunities to share best practice at the University's Teaching and Learning Task Group. The review team found that innovation was a key facet of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, for example, in the psychology curriculum where alternative approaches to curriculum design were proposed, and in student support through the use of learning analytics.

57   The University promotes teaching excellence through institutional and national teaching excellence schemes. The University has also won three bids for HEA funded projects in recent years in recognition for teaching development and CPD. It has used funding to develop a Postgraduate Progress Review online system, and to successfully pilot bringing forward resit exams from August to July to prevent students from disengaging over the summer.

58   The review team confirms that the University's successes in identifying and sharing best practice highlight its support for, and commitment to, staff development in teaching in order to enhance the student experience.

3.4   Engaging, developing and supporting staff

59   The review team learnt that the University offers a wide range of opportunities to develop and support its staff. The University provides a fair and inclusive environment for all its employees where both teaching and research are treated with the same regard. The team found that the University actively consults when developing strategies that support and develop staff. The University operates a professional development scheme that all staff

participate in, and which also enables the identification and sharing of good practice. To support academic career development the University simplified the criteria for promotion and has introduced a Professorial Framework which has made the criteria for promotion more transparent and has encouraged more staff to apply for promotions. The University has a Staff Development Programme for both academic and professional staff and has launched a coaching and mentoring policy. A researcher development website also provides information on staff development opportunities and career advice. The team found a genuine commitment to the Welsh language across the University with all staff and students offered the opportunity to learn and enhance their Welsh language skills.

3.5 Effectiveness of the approach to implementing institutional strategies and enhancing learning and teaching

60   The review team found that despite changes across the higher education sector, the University continues to effectively implement institutional strategies, while maintaining academic standards. This has been achieved by innovations in collaborative curriculum design, a range of student support services, student engagement activities and working in partnership with students, and many enhancement projects. While the team found that not all projects and innovations are fully embedded, it is confident that its enhancement approach is effective and has a good track record of enhancing learning and teaching.

4 Academic standards and quality processes

4.1 Key features of the provider's approach to managing quality and how students are involved in contributing to the management of the quality of learning

61   The University's approach to the management of student learning is multi-layered and pluralistic, seeking to involve students and staff at all levels. The regulatory framework prescribes clear structures of responsibility and accountability, together with detailed procedures for management of quality. These are set out in the Regulations, the Codes of Practice and the Procedures and Guidelines. Students are represented at all levels of deliberation and decision-making, from membership of Boards of Studies in individual schools to membership of Council. Students play active roles in the design of learning and teaching policies and in monitoring their implementation at both institutional and school levels. The number and range of task groups and committees attended by students is considerable, however the Students' Union officers, who are members of University-level task groups and Council, and student representatives that are members of college and school committees and panels, agree that these levels of representation were both feasible and effective. These confirmations, together with other evidence of student contributions reported below, support the commendation described at paragraph 72.

62   The University has a network of cross-University committees and task groups supported by staff at all levels to facilitate interaction and shared responsibility among academics, professional staff and students for the management of quality and standards. Formal responsibility for quality and standards lies with the Senate, which reports to Council. Senate delegates oversight of the development of education strategy to the Teaching and Learning Task Group (TLTG). Responsibility for monitoring the detailed application of academic regulations and procedures is delegated to the Quality Assurance and Validation Task Group (QAVTG). Both of these task groups are chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) and operational support is provided by the Quality Assurance and Validation Unit (QAVU). The minutes of both these Task Groups demonstrate evidence of careful oversight of the quality of learning and teaching. The University-level structures and roles are mirrored in the colleges and the individual academic schools where Directors of Learning and Teaching and Boards of Studies monitor quality and standards and ensure the implementation of University policies.

63   Fundamental to the management of the quality of teaching and the student learning experience are the University's procedures for annual monitoring of modules and degree programmes and the six-yearly Internal Quality Audits (IQAs) of schools. Students contribute to annual monitoring through module and programme online evaluations, participation in module cohort meetings and focus groups, and representation on Staff-student Liaison Committees. The periodic IQAs consider a formal student submission and the Students' Union President is a member of the IQA panel. Schools are required to respond to IQA reports and recommendations with action plans which are further considered at Mid-term Reviews after three years. There is evidence to suggest that the University's periodic reviews of the quality of student learning and support has moved beyond monitoring compliance to encouraging and pursuing systematic innovation and enhancement. Programmes delivered by partners are reviewed every five years and the partners are also subject to re-approval every five years using procedures that mirror the internal IQAs.

4.2 Key features of the approach to setting, maintain, reviewing and assessing academic standards

64   The University has in place comprehensive regulations and procedures that ensure the rigorous assessment of student attainment and the application of appropriate standards

when awarding degrees. The principal mechanisms for setting and applying academic standards are the programme and module approval and revalidation processes, the scrupulous use of external examiners to confirm the application of external reference points and the annual monitoring of the marks achieved by students. In addition, from 2016-17, the University developed and applied a new institutional-level Assessment Framework and there is evidence that this has led to greater consistency in approaches to assessment methods across the University. The review team **affirms** the implementation of the Assessment Framework to ensure consistency of assessment.

65   Programme approval processes had been judged appropriate by the 2012 QAA review but have been further strengthened from 2017-18 following the adoption of a new Code of Practice for Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review. The revised approval procedures use external subject experts and consult external stakeholders such as PSRBs and employers both earlier and continuously throughout the process. They have also increased the involvement of students in the design of modules and programmes. Trained student advisors assist in the preparation of module and programme descriptions and final approval judgements are made by new Programme and Module Approval Groups that include an experienced student assessor.

66   The University conducts a statistical analysis of student marks on an annual basis in order to compare student attainment across all modules and programmes and to compare the performance of students at the University with the sector nationally. The Assessment Reports on the Quality of University Examinations (ARQUE) identify degree scheme effects and trends over time. Each school receives an annual ARQUE statistical report on all relevant modules, which is examined and responded to by the School Board of Studies in collaboration with external examiners where necessary. These reports allow diagnosis of any problems at module or programme level which are then addressed in Annual Review and Development plans. In addition, the University demonstrated that where issues are identified in external examiner reports, it responds appropriately, reporting to the Quality Assurance and Validation Task Group on action taken. The evidence seen and heard by the review team allows it to conclude that the academic standards set by the University for student attainment are rigorous and consistent with relevant national benchmarks and qualification frameworks.

4.3   Use of external reference points in quality processes

67   The University has in place academic regulations, codes of practice and routine administrative procedures that ensure that the degree programmes it delivers and the awards it makes are consistent with current external academic reference points, statutory requirements and guides to good practice relevant to higher education in the UK. The University applies the academic baseline regulatory requirements specified in the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales and Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and for its own assurance has mapped its regulations and procedures against these.

68   The University is proactive in ensuring its management of quality and standards remains up to date with the changes in regulatory requirements and relevant guidance. The QAVU monitors changes in the regulatory environment, notifies colleges, schools and service departments, and subsequently checks compliance. In 2016-17, the Academic Registry conducted a comprehensive review and mapping of the University's rules, regulations and procedures against all higher education expectations and indicators. The review team used the detailed mapping tables provided in the University's Change Report to check if and how it met the regulatory requirements, and questioned staff and students about the ways in which the relevant external reference points and guidance are applied. The

University has in place appropriate rules and procedures, and these are actively and conscientiously applied and updated.

4.4 Commentary on action taken since the previous review and identification of matters arising from the Prior Information Pack not otherwise explored

69   The 2012 QAA Institutional Review reached judgements of confidence in the University's current and likely future management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. In addition, the report made five advisable and six desirable recommendations. In 2015, the QAA Mid-process Student-Focused Engagement reported that Bangor University had made good progress in addressing the recommendations of the 2012 review. The University had responded to the recommendations with an action plan overseen by an Institutional Review Task Group that monitored its implementation. The current review team consider that the responses more than met the specific 2012 recommendations and can be understood as part of the ongoing pattern of innovation and enhancement described elsewhere in this report. The changes have included: strengthening the accountability of key task groups to Senate; increasing external and student involvement in programme approval and revalidation processes; ongoing and systematic responses to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements; enhanced content accuracy and consistency of online Student Handbooks, published information and websites; and greater and earlier involvement of students in the development of the curriculum.

4.5 Approach to using data to inform decision-making and evaluation

70   The University described itself to the review team as a data-rich and evidence-based University that uses a wide range of information to monitor outcomes and to choose areas for development and enhancement. The review team found numerous examples of the systematic collection and use of data to design and pursue improvements and which linked the collection of data and the achievement of measurable improvements. Data had been used effectively primarily in three main areas: to monitor and manage the quality of learning and teaching; to identify where individual students face academic or other difficulties and intervention effectively; and to discover opportunities to improve the efficiency of administrative and student support services.

71   The annual monitoring of the quality and effectiveness of teaching is informed by ARQUE data on student attainment, reports from external examiners and by the online module evaluation questionnaires completed by students. Module evaluation response rates are good by sector standards and use a common set of questions that enable the comparison of modules and programmes over time, and for individual teaching staff to receive feedback on their own teaching. While module evaluations are common practice across the sector, the review team saw and heard evidence of the effective use of them to generate and monitor action plans at both programme and school levels. Programme action plans are complemented by student-led analyses of NSS data at annual Action Plan conferences which use the data to identify departmental learning priorities for the year ahead. Outcomes have included changes to assessment patterns, the introduction of more extracurricular activity, and alternations to methods of teaching. These uses of data have been associated with an improving NSS score for overall satisfaction, rising from 84 per cent (75th in the UK) in 2012-13 to 91 per cent (top 10 in the UK, and highest in Wales) in 2016-17.

72   The University has developed an in-house system of learning analytics accessible within its student portal, MyBangor. The review team met the team from the Student and Learning Applications Unit that had developed the software and was able to see how the

system was increasingly used by staff and students. For instance, the data had shown a strong correlation between students' under-engagement in the first weeks of a course and lower marks or failure. Tutors and the Student Engagement Unit use the learning analytics data to contact and work with students who are under-engaging in their programmes and were successful in significantly improving student retention by up to 40 per cent in some schools. As well as the learning analytics data, the MyBangor portal gives academic staff access to a range of information and analysis useful when meeting individual students: grades and class averages, attendance, Personal Learning Support Plans, histories of requests for extensions, and student timetables. MyBangor also allows students to see much of this data, as well as access handbooks, marks and feedback. The system enables students to raise online requests for extensions, exam resits, changes to modules and programmes, and to submit activities for the Employability Award and HEAR. The review team found strong evidence from both students and staff that the online learning analytics, together with use of the online services available through MyBangor, were making measurable contributions to student performance, engagement and retention, as well as to the overall efficiency of student and course administration. The review team **commends** the systematic collection and use of student engagement and performance data to inform and enhance student support and academic progress.

73   The University uses data to increase the range and efficiency of student services and to rationalise administrative processes such as recruitment and admissions, registration, multiple choice marking, the management of student employability activities, module questionnaires and other surveys, and the monitoring and support for research students. Bangor's University's Student Services departments use data systematically to monitor processes, to measure outcomes and to compare them with the wider higher education sector. These data sources include measures of student take-up, responses and evaluations, and are analysed in a context of external benchmarks, DLHE, retention data, NSS data, and data from other universities. The Student Services provision is regularly appraised for its Matrix standard award, the UK quality standard for information, advice and guidance services. In the most recent Matrix assessment (November 2016), the report commended the highly effective promotion of its services to students, the student-centric culture that tailors support to the needs of the individual, and the commitment to improving the services in response to student and partner feedback.

4.6   Effectiveness of how approaches to quality are used to enhance learning and teaching

74   The University's quality management procedures and processes have received confidence judgments in all previous QAA reviews. The University continues to have quality management processes and arrangements that are robust and effective. A particular strength is the commitment to continuous improvement reflected in the recent reviews and enhancements to the procedures for annual monitoring, periodic review and programme revalidations. These have been strengthened by a growing use of sophisticated data sources, particularly comparative data on student attainment and engagement, increased external and employer scrutiny, and effective participation by trained student representatives. The effectiveness of the management of quality has been confirmed by significant increases in NSS scores over the last four years and by measurable improvements in student retention and attainment.

4.7   Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards

75   Section 4.2 summarises the regulations and procedures used by the University to set and maintain the standards of its awards. The core elements of the management of standards are adherence to relevant qualification frameworks and national and international academic guidelines, the use of external, employer and professional advice in designing and

reviewing degree programmes, and the rigorous use of externals in the examination and assessment of students. The University routinely reviews the mapping of its own procedures against relevant external reference points and guides to best practice.

76   The University provided a detailed examination of the reasons why, while Bangor University's entry tariffs are above the sector median, the proportion of good degrees (1sts and 2:1s) it awarded was below the sector median in 2014-15 and 2015-16. The explanations explored included obstacles to student learning and achievement, potential inappropriate assessment methods, and cultures of marking in some subjects or schools. The review team concurs with the University's conclusion that the fundamental cause is cultures of harsher marking in some schools and not weaknesses in teaching or student learning support. The review team welcomes the fact that external examiners' reports are particularly positive in their endorsement of standards and the robustness of assessment methods. It is notable that since the University began to address the underlying reasons beneath this data directly in 2014-15, the proportion of good degrees awarded across the University has increased to 69 per cent which is only slighter lower than the relevant national median.

77   The review team concludes that the academic standards set and maintained by the University for student attainment are rigorous and consistent with relevant national benchmarks and award frameworks.

4.8   Effectiveness of the provider's approach to self-evaluation, including the effective use of data to inform decision-making

78   Sections 4.1 and 4.5 summarise the methods that the University uses to monitor, review and where necessary improve and enhance its activities. Distinctive features of the approaches used at the University are partnerships with students and the systematic use of data to manage learning and teaching. A considerable strength is the involvement of students as partners at all levels of decision making and the care with which students' views are collected and responded to. Students that met with the review team confirmed that changes are made in response to their feedback. As described in section 4.5, the University has developed increasingly comprehensive and accessible ways to use data to innovate and to measure outcomes. These include the ARQUE reports to evaluate student attainment, module evaluations and student surveys to strengthen annual monitoring and school plans, key performance indicators to identify any areas of underperformance, and the use of learner analytics to monitor and respond to student attainment and engagement.
The review team commends the University's systematic use of student data to support students (see paragraph 72).

5 Collaborative provision

5.1 Key features of the provider's strategic approach (to include collaborative activity, online and distance learning where delivered with others, and work-based learning)

79   The University sees its collaborative provision as being an integral part of its vision of being 'a successful international university for North Wales'. In pursuit of this, it has developed regional and national programmes (including programmes designed to address strategic issues identified by the Welsh Government, to widen access), programmes in specialist areas of mutual interest to the University and its partners (including healthcare and forestry, and through Doctoral Training Partnerships), and international partnerships (in China, Singapore and elsewhere). It maintains a comprehensive Collaborative Provision Register. The international strategy is driven by the Vice-Chancellor with the active support of Council.

5.2 Information on the extent and nature of collaborative provision and plans for change

80   In line with its declared policy and strategic objectives, the University has a limited number of carefully selected collaborative arrangements, including some inherited from the University of Wales. The current provision includes Doctoral Training Partnerships, franchised, validated and dual and/or double awards, as well as articulation arrangements, and various arrangements for student placements both domestically and internationally. There is significant activity with Grŵp Llandrillo Menai in the provision of Higher National Diplomas, Foundation Degrees and degree programmes in north and mid-Wales which for quality purposes are treated as Bangor University programmes, with appropriate provision and management. There are undergraduate programmes in Business Studies, Computer Science, and Tourism delivered by the Business School in collaboration with the Management Development Institute of Singapore in Singapore and in Uzbekistan. A Diploma of Higher Education programme in Bahrain allows successful students to articulate onto an Honours programme at the University, as do a number of specific programmes with institutions in China and Malaysia.

81   Bangor International College, a joint enterprise with Oxford International Education Group, provides integrated foundation year programmes intended to widen access to Bangor University degree programmes from those from overseas.

82   The University has no fully developed current plans for further collaborative arrangements, but the review team heard that the University is alert to international opportunities, and that a new Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision has recently been developed to support any such activity.

5.3 Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative provision including arrangements for securing academic standards and enhancing the student learning experience

83   All collaborative programmes, regardless of mode and model, are subject to Bangor University's standard procedures for quality assurance and management. An External Partnerships Scrutiny Group monitors the arrangements and reports directly to the Executive. College Deans are members of this Group ensuring a link to the colleges and schools.

84   Based on the information provided, the review team considers that processes for managing the quality and standards of collaborative provision are effective. In particular, the

use of Bangor University's external examiners, and the appointment of independent moderators where appropriate, the use of Bangor staff for delivery (including overseas delivery), and the provision of Bangor staff training arrangements for partners' staff, ensure that the University's programmes or modules delivered by others are of a comparable standard to those delivered at Bangor University. The University's own arrangements are also applied in programme review where appropriate, as in the case of Bangor International College which like academic schools, has also been subject to an IQA.

85   The review team finds that quality assurance mechanisms for collaborative provision are effective in practice in that they can detect and address any weaknesses. The review team notes concerns expressed by external examiners about the operation of the programmes at MDIS in Tashkent (originally developed by the University of Wales), although while also noting that the external examiners have been able to assure the University that there is evidence that the required academic standards are being met. The University has responded appropriately by providing some direct support (such as for the management of Examination Boards, and by providing staff development input from staff from CELT). The University also intends to move the Tashkent provision from validated to franchised provision during the next revalidation process. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to address the deficiencies in the provision at MDIS Tashkent.

86   The University is fully engaged with its partners in assuring the quality of its provision. For example, the Teaching Partnerships Office has been established to assist partner institutions to ensure the maintenance of standards including the approval of course handbooks and other documentation.

87   In discussions with the review team, staff and students agreed that students that enrol through articulation or access arrangements are well-prepared academically before enrolling at the University. In some cases, students come to the University for a foundation year before their course begins in order to complete their preparations including cultural adjustments.

88   Learning support for students studying at a distance or at other providers is designed to mirror provision in Bangor University as far as possible. The review team was told, for example, of the easy accessibility of MyBangor and the VLE for students based in Wrexham, and of the provision of VLE access for students based in China. Professional support staff were clearly aware of the need for diverse and relevant forms of delivery of support services to students in a wide range of places and situations.