QAA

Cardiff University

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

April 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Cardiff University. The review took place on 31 March - 4 April 2014 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Aulay Mackenzie
- Professor Peter Bush
- Professor Helen Marshall
- Miss Charlotte Richer (student reviewer)
- Mr Tony Platt (review secretary).

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

- makes judgements on
  - threshold academic standards[1]
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the information provided about learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides commentaries on the theme topic
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] Background information about Cardiff University is given on page 3 of this report. 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.

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Cardiff University

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

- Academic standards at the University **meet** UK expectations for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.
- Information about learning opportunities produced by the University **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The appropriate, widespread and responsive staff development opportunities in learning and teaching, including those extended to postgraduate students (paragraph 2.1.7).
- The University's work in supporting and embedding the positive contributions of students in developing a culture of enhancement for the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 2.3.4).
- The comprehensive implementation of management information to support quality and standards at all levels, including aspects of enhancement (paragraph 2.4.2).
- The practice of monitoring regularly at University executive level the progress of key university-wide strategies for the enhancement of learning opportunities (paragraph 4.12).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Cardiff University.

From the start of the academic year 2014-15:

- keep under review the potential for unintended consequences for student performance and degree classification of plans to insert modules at levels 5, 6 and 7 into years of study that normally correspond to academic levels 4, 5 and 6 (paragraph 1.1.2)
- keep under close scrutiny the production of final year results for medical students until satisfied that the new system for recording and reporting results is error free (paragraph 1.3.3).

By commencement of the academic year 2015-16:

- move swiftly to ensure comprehensive implementation of the Assessment Matters framework across all provision (paragraph 1.3.1).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action that Cardiff University is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The University's decision to produce an annual review of enhancement from 2014-15 (paragraph 4.11).

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the operational description and handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining Institutional Review in Wales.[4]

About Cardiff University

Cardiff University's mission is to create and share knowledge and to educate for the benefit of all. Its ambition is to be a world-leading, research-excellent, educationally outstanding university, driven by creativity and curiosity, fulfilling its social, cultural and economic obligations to Cardiff, Wales and the world.

Founded in 1883, the University has existed in its current form since 2005, with the merger of University of Wales, Cardiff and the University of Wales College of Medicine. In 2005, both the title 'Cardiff University' and a new Supplemental Charter were granted, formally establishing Cardiff University as a University in its own right, fully independent of the University of Wales. Cardiff University is the only Welsh member of the Russell Group of research-intensive universities.

The University is a research-led institution. It offers educational opportunities across a broad range of disciplines and professions. There are over 21,000 undergraduate and almost 7,500 postgraduate students at Cardiff, supported by more than 6,000 staff of which some 3,000 are academic staff engaged in teaching and/or research.

Since the academic session 2012-13, academic activity has been conducted through three Colleges (Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; Biomedical and Life Sciences; Physical Sciences and Engineering) which are made up of a total of 26 Schools, and a University Graduate College. Council is the governing authority of the University, with Senate the supreme academic decision-making body.

A number of significant organisational changes have occurred since 2008. In January 2012 a new Chair of Council was appointed, and in September 2012 a new President and Vice-Chancellor arrived.

Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) positions have been established to head the three Colleges and to cover the thematic areas of Research, Innovation and Enterprise, Student Experience and Academic Standards, and International and Engagement. Each College has Deans for Education and Students, for Research, Innovation and Enterprise, and for International activity. The University Graduate College (UGC) is a centre for training and skills development. The University is currently in a period of transition as the new structural organisation becomes embedded.

The University regards its immediate strategic priorities to be meeting changing student

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/Pages/Institutional-review.aspx

needs as well as stakeholder expectations, improving consistency of experience, and building on the existing strengths of the student partnership. Actively ensuring the standards and excellence of its provision is considered essential during this period of considerable structural transition. The University has established key performance indicators to monitor progress.

The University is fully aware of its responsibilities to promote the Welsh Language and works to build and sustain Welsh Language opportunities for its students. It actively participates in the activities of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and has built a good relationship with the Coleg. The University is the sole provider of a number of discipline areas, and is keen to develop support for the Welsh language workforce in these areas.

The University has 22 articulation, validation, franchise or multiple-award collaborative arrangements with international partners. There is an extensive range of study abroad agreements, currently 198, largely developed according to programme requirements. The University is a member of six doctoral training partnerships.

The University has the strategic objective of developing formal collaborations with selected UK and international partners and has recently established the Great Western Four (GW4) consortium with the universities of Bath, Bristol and Exeter. The University has also responded to key Welsh Government initiatives, for example, the Master's programme in Educational Practice, which partners with Bangor, Aberystwyth and the Institute of Education, University of London, to deliver higher-level teaching skills for recently qualified teachers across Wales.

Explanation of the findings about Cardiff University

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.[5]

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms[6] 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.[7]

1   Academic standards

Outcome

The academic standards at Cardiff University **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1   The University's programmes of study are aligned with the levels specified in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). A range of other external reference points are also considered when designing courses. These include the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* (CQFW), professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements and delivery via the medium of Welsh. The University provides guidance on programme design and the nature and volume of assessment. Staff find these useful in explaining how external reference points are used in the development and monitoring of programmes. Examples of programme proposal documents seen by the team demonstrate that external reference points are used appropriately in programme approval.

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

1.1.2   The team noted that there are plans to insert modules at levels 5, 6 and 7 into years of study that correspond to levels 4, 5 and 6. This is permitted by the FHEQ and the University's modular scheme and the University rules for degree classification have been revised to take account of this development. However, the review team **recommends** that the University keep under review the potential for unintended consequences for student performance and degree classification of plans to insert modules at levels 5, 6 and 7 into years of study that normally correspond to academic levels 4, 5 and 6.

Use of external examiners

1.2   Scrupulous use is made of external examiners by the University. The processes and arrangements for external examining are clear and comprehensive and external examiner reports are considered seriously at all levels of the University.

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[5] The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However it is available on request for inspection. Please contact QAA Reviews Group.
[6] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.
[7] See note 4.

1.2.1   Arrangements for the appointment of external examiners are set out in the Academic Regulations Handbook 2013-14. Nominations are made by the relevant Head of School and approved by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC). Appointments are for three years with a possible extension to four. This period of office results in a high turnover of examiners and the University has moved to a four-year term of office to better manage the process. There are checking processes in place to ensure that examiners are drawn from a wide range of organisations and are sufficiently experienced and senior to be able to fulfil the role.

1.2.2   The role of the external examiner is set out in the Academic Regulations Handbook 2013-14. External examiners report on an annual basis as soon as possible after the examination boards have met. The report states whether standards set and achieved are appropriate to the level of award by reference to published benchmarks and other external reference points and standards at other similar institutions. Additionally external examiners comment on assessment practice and process. ASQC receives an overview report annually, which enables it to receive assurance on academic attainment and the conduct of the assessment process.

1.2.3   Reports are received by the Registry on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor. The Registry identifies issues that require a university-level response and send them to an appropriate person for action. Actions at school level are the responsibility of the Head of School who responds to the examiner following consideration of the report at the School Board of Studies. Reports and responses are available online for staff and students to access. Letters to examiners contain detailed responses that appropriately address comments made in the reports and are sent promptly. Actions in response to the report are followed through the annual review process to ensure they are implemented.

Assessment and standards

1.3   The University places considerable emphasis on the need to ensure that assessment provides students with opportunities to demonstrate achievement of relevant learning outcomes. It has recently undertaken a major review of its policy and practice in the area of assessment. The review, known as 'Assessment Matters' aimed to ensure consistency, fairness and transparency for students; clarity, transparency and greater efficiency in the management of assessment for staff; and enhanced confidence in the standards of awards and in the probity of the systems used to manage awards for the University. The work has produced a revised University framework that guides policy and practice in the area of assessment. The project has completed its review of policy and practice and is now in the implementation phase. Staff reported examples of changes to practice and in particular more innovative assessment, better alignment with learning outcomes and a more consistent assessment load across modules, programmes and schools.

1.3.1   Assessment strategy is considered as part of programme approval. Student handbooks set out assessment requirements and hand-in dates for work. Staff reported that assessment criteria are managed at school level and are still to be influenced by the generic university-wide assessment criteria being developed by the Assessment Matters project. In 2012 the Senate approved a policy that feedback on assessment should be given to students within four working weeks. Students who met with reviewers reported that feedback dates were not routinely set out in programme handbooks and that feedback turnaround times varied from next day to two months. In addition it was reported that the quality and quantity of feedback varied from helpful and full to limited and unhelpful. The Assessment Matters project has established a potentially effective framework for the design and operation of assessment practice but there is still considerable work to do before the outputs can be considered embedded practice within the University. The team **recommend** that the

University move swiftly to ensure comprehensive implementation of the Assessment Matters framework across all provision.

1.3.2   The University's academic regulations set out a comprehensive set of requirements for the conduct of examinations and other forms of assessment, including marking and moderation processes, and assessment in the Welsh language. Additionally, the University has a policy for the consideration of extenuating circumstances, which is effectively implemented. External examiner reports confirm that standards of awards are appropriate and comparable to those at other similar universities.

1.3.3   The review team learned that in 2009 there were serious data errors relating to the final marks of graduating Medical School students. This resulted in some students being wrongly failed and some wrongly passed. These incorrect outcomes were subsequently corrected. Actions were also taken to rectify underlying issues with data production and management. In the summer of 2012 there were further data errors relating to the final classification results for graduating medical students. In the summer of 2012 the Vice-Chancellor instigated a full investigation into data issues in the Medical School. The resulting report identified systemic issues in the production and management of data exacerbated by regular changes to assessment practice within the medical degree. Risks to the production of final year results in the summer of 2013 were also signalled. In the event there were further data errors in the production of results for medical students graduating in 2013. The recommendations of the investigation report have been implemented but no results, based on the new arrangements, have yet been produced. The underlying problem of a standalone, fragmented database located in the Medical School has been addressed through the implementation of the University's student record management system, which enables the calculation of module marks, progression and award outcomes from one single source. The Medical School records are being kept as an operating backup system for the next three years until the new arrangements have proved reliable. The review team are satisfied that the new arrangements have the potential to produce accurate and reliable final results for graduating medical students. The review team **recommends** that the University keeps the production of final year medical students' results under close scrutiny until it is satisfied that the new system is error free.

1.3.4   In common with all universities in Wales, Cardiff University permits students to submit any assessment in the Welsh language, and will arrange translation for the purposes of marking. There are a number of modules delivered in Welsh across the University with appropriate translation arrangements in place for any moderation or external examining purposes.

1.3.5   Senate has oversight of academic attainment and assessment practice through an annual reporting system. The annual report covers academic attainment as well as a range of assessment practice issues. The reports signal a satisfactory picture but continue to assert the priority being given by the University to the enhancement of assessment practice.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.4   Processes for setting and maintaining standards are well defined and implemented appropriately.

1.4.1   Proposals for new programmes are considered by ASQC, which operates under delegated authority from Senate. New programmes need to demonstrate a fit with the University's mission, and the University and Schools' strategic plans.

1.4.2   The University has produced a guide on programme approval and maintenance, which is used by staff who are involved in the development of new programmes or changes

to programmes of study. Guidance on the structure of taught programmes has recently been issued. This includes the advice that all new and revalidated programmes should normally be built around of at least 20 credits, with some limited exceptions, to better manage curriculum delivery and assessment and improve the consistency of the student experience of learning and assessment. Staff were able to give the team examples of positive changes to teaching and assessment practice following these changes. Examples of programme approval records reviewed by the team demonstrated that the arrangements are robust and conducted in line with published guidance.

1.4.3   The University has recently reviewed and evolved arrangements for periodic review and annual monitoring and linked these processes more closely. Periodic review is seen as the strategic component of the quality system. Annual monitoring, referred to as Annual Review and Enhancement (ARE), provides an annual health check. Periodic review is undertaken on a five-yearly cycle. Where possible the cycle is aligned with PSRB revalidation requirements. The outcome of periodic review takes the form of a final report and an action plan which is implemented and monitored through the ARE process. Examples of periodic review action plans and reports seen by the team demonstrate that the process is being applied in a robust manner with relevant actions being set following the review.

1.4.4   The ARE process is based on a centrally produced data set that incorporates application and conversion data, student profiles, progression and completion rates, graduate employment and National Student Survey (NSS) results. These are presented on a three-year trend graph to enable staff in the school to undertake an analysis of trends. There is also an emphasis on enhancement. The initial ARE review report is considered by the relevant taught and research board of studies, or equivalent, before being presented to the School Board. A school-level synopsis is produced and is considered by the college ARE committees. These committees are chaired by the College Deans of Education and students have student representation. Following consideration of the school synopsis a meeting takes place with the Head of School to agree a final version of the action plan to be taken forward. A consolidated College report allows university-level actions to be identified and taken forward by the Chief Operating Officer and the Pro Vice-Chancellor Student Experience and Academic Standards. Staff who met the review team commented that the new process allowed a single and more holistic focus on the issues at programme, school and university level within the ARE process, which has enabled a greater focus on enhancement.

Subject benchmarks

1.5   The effective use of subject benchmark and qualification statements in programme design and approval is evident.

1.5.1   Staff who propose new programmes of study are required to examine the alignment of the proposed programme with subject benchmark statements. In addition they are expected to seek external advice in the development of the proposal from a range of sources including external experts, PSRBs or relevant employers. Proposals for new programmes contain appropriate alignment to these external reference points.

1.5.2   A number of the University's programmes are accredited by PSRBs. The relevant PSRBs are routinely consulted at programme development and approval stages and in some cases programme approval events contain PSRB members on the Programme Approval Panel. ASQC receives reports from PSRB visits and scrutinises actions and responses. Where PSRB requirements are not in alignment with the University's regulations, exceptions may be applied for at the point of programme approval. Effective oversight of alignment with PSRB requirements is maintained by ASQC.

2   Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at Cardiff University **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1   There is extensive availability of staff development opportunities to support learning and teaching. Opportunities are both centrally and locally provided, including training courses, workshops and an annual learning and teaching conference. The team heard from a variety of staff of the value placed on learning and teaching and of the efficacy of the continuing professional development (CPD) in place.

2.1.1   The value placed by the institution on teaching and learning is evidenced and supported by recently developed career pathways in teaching and scholarship, potentially leading to professorships. The team met staff who had been promoted on this route and had received support to do so.

2.1.2   The Post Graduate Certificate in University Teaching and Learning (PCUTL), accredited by the Higher Education Academy, underpins the development of learning and teaching skills in new staff. Completion of three of the four PCUTL modules is a condition of successful completion of probation for academic staff. The review team heard from several staff who had undertaken the PCUTL programme of the positive impact the programme had made, and it was apparent that the benefits went beyond their immediate development and benefited other colleagues. The University has noted that the PCUTL's success has led to oversubscription and this had therefore limited access to established non-probationary staff. The review team heard that the University's Higher Education Academy accredited courses, including the PCUTL and other learning and teaching support courses, are due to be reviewed in 2014-15 with a view to ensuring access to suitable opportunities.

2.1.3   Peer review of teaching is actively engaged with and is a component of the PCUTL. The team heard evidence to indicate this peer review activity engages established staff with the PCUTL and with learning and teaching processes in general.

2.1.4   The University gives prominence to achievements and developments in learning and teaching, including promotion of the achievements of National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) award winners and by incorporating both teaching and student experience as categories in the annual Celebrating Excellence awards made by the University.

2.1.5   The University's Code of Practice for Research Degrees clearly establishes the responsibilities around postgraduate student teaching. It is the responsibility of the Head of School to ensure that research students who wish to be considered for teaching opportunities must have undertaken adequate training appropriate to the proposed teaching activity. The University provides a variety of training for postgraduate research students who teach, both centrally by the University Graduate College programmes, and through school-based specific subject-orientated training.

2.1.6   The University plans to establish a Learning Enhancement Unit to coordinate expertise and activities to include the development of teaching and assessment methods. The intention is to launch in autumn 2014, with expansion following in spring 2015 (see also paragraph 4.3).

2.1.7   The appropriate, widespread and responsive staff development opportunities in learning and teaching, including those extended to postgraduate students are a feature of **good practice**.

Learning resources

2.2   The learning resources provided by the University are appropriately planned and deployed and are designed to facilitate the achievement of student learning outcomes.

2.2.1   The University's strategy for the deployment and enhancement of learning resources is set out in *Education and Students: The Way Forward 2012*-17 in the light of the directives established in the University's strategic plan, *The Way Forward 2012-2017*. The Estates Plan is, in turn, linked to the Professional Services' annual plans. The University Executive Board (UEB) and senior leaders provide strategic and institutional-level oversight of projects to develop learning opportunities and there is evidence of meaningful Students' Union involvement at each stage of review.

2.2.2   Student feedback on learning resources is routinely collected by central services, who demonstrably use this student involvement and feedback to review and enhance provision. These plans are reviewed alongside school ARE reports. Subject librarians work with the student-staff panels, and changes to resources resulting from student feedback are communicated to the student body through the 'You said, we did' campaign.

2.2.3   Students have access to libraries across the University. Additional investment in stock has occurred over the last two years. While reporting some variations in opening hours, access and loan arrangements, the students whom the team met confirmed their opportunity to feed back on library stock and felt supported to access material that might not be directly available. The team noted some concerns regarding lack of access to working spaces for postgraduate research students in some schools and some dissatisfaction around the inconsistencies in models used to allocate working space. The University's timely response to these concerns was evident, with the provision of immediate alternative arrangements and the inclusion of working spaces for postgraduate research students in the Estates Plan as an area for long-term development.

2.2.4   The University's virtual learning environment, Learning Central, is the online hub for students to access online learning materials and to track their progress. There has been considerable progress in promoting full and consistent use of Learning Central and these developments have been positively received by students. Lecturing staff are supported by the Learning Technology Team in online lecture recording and with work to develop the consistency of virtual learning opportunities across modules. The University is investing in further enhancements through the Education Technology and Student Data Lifecycle project.

Student voice

2.3   Students make an effective and positive contribution to quality assurance at the University. Their contributions have been central to the development of a culture of enhancement in respect of the quality of learning opportunities.

2.3.1   There is an embedded system of student representation across the University. Student representatives are members of all committees and decision-making bodies with a direct remit for learning and teaching across the University. Formal dialogue around quality assurance is enhanced by the Students' Union's comprehensive annual student written submission, to which the University prepares a constructive response. Students are routinely invited to contribute to the Annual Review and Enhancement (ARE) process, and representatives sit on the College ARE committees. The University has recently introduced

the formal involvement of students in periodic review as members of review teams. Students are active in student/staff panels and school learning and teaching committees. At both a central and a school level, staff and students were able to point towards examples of positive outcomes to the student learning experience as a result of the contributions of student representatives to these committees and networks.

2.3.2   There are strong links between the Students' Union and senior University staff, set out in a relationship agreement. The University's approach to student voice and its partnership with the Students' Union is self-evaluative, with clear ambitions and regular, consultative review of progress against targets. Student representatives make use of regular access to senior managers and staff through regular policy network meetings and forums. As the University develops its college-wide procedures for quality assurance and standards, it may wish to ensure that students are formally involved in these processes. There are effective links between the University Graduate College and the postgraduate student representative network.

2.3.3   The student academic representative system is managed by both the University and the Students' Union, with central Students' Union oversight supported by designated staff within schools. There is evidence of good uptake of appropriate and well designed training and support materials.

2.3.4   The University makes extensive use of student surveys, including the embedding of NSS, Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) outcomes in the ARE process and in student/staff panel discussions. In addition to module surveys and school consultations, the central services conduct regular student surveys. The outcomes of consultations, and the University's subsequent response, are routinely fed back to students through representative networks and through the 'You said, we did' campaign. The University's work in supporting and embedding the positive contributions of students in developing a culture of enhancement for the quality of learning opportunities is a **feature of good practice**.

Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.4   The University demonstrated effective use of management information through the use of well structured benchmark dashboards, which include historical trend data at school, college and University levels and with specific targets agreed via the performance review process. Annual Review and Enhancement (ARE) dashboards provide a comprehensive overview at the school level for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. The team heard of the provision of finer scale analysis as required at the programme and module level. Elements of the enhancement programme have been added to the ARE dashboard and hence integrated into the ARE process. There are ongoing plans to expand and develop dashboard enhancement components.

2.4.1   The team saw evidence of robust consideration of management information, including that referring to (i) NSS, PTES and PRES; and (ii) progression and achievement statistics. This was seen to occur across the full spectrum of the committee structure and fed into the annual review process. Further, the University has developed a sound approach to considering and responding to the free text responses to student surveys, which feed into 'You said, we did' feedback statements. The Annual Report on Assessment incorporates a very clear dashboard graphical data summary including historical trends.

2.4.2   The comprehensive implementation of management information to support quality and standards at all levels and including aspects of enhancement is a **feature of good practice**.

Admission to the University

2.5   The University provides a clear statement of the principles guiding admissions procedures through its Admissions Framework, which is accessible to staff, prospective students and their advisers through the University's public website. The Admissions Framework articulates the University's ambitions to attract, recruit and retain students with the potential to succeed, irrespective of background. Fair, equitable and effective implementation of the Admissions Framework is monitored through the Admissions Sub-Committee on behalf of ASQC. The Admissions Framework sits alongside a Contextual Admissions Policy, which flags candidates on stated socio-demographic criteria for additional consideration as part of the University's widening participation commitments.

2.5.1   Staff involved in admissions decision-making processes, including academic admissions tutors, are provided with formal, compulsory training and regular briefings. There is central oversight of the implementation and communication of admissions procedures.

2.5.2   Prospective students and their advisers are provided with clear information on admissions processes and policies. Minimum entry requirements, standard offers and Key Information Sets are provided through the central Course Finder database. According to students met by the team, this resource has been well received.

2.5.3   There is evidence of effective monitoring of admissions procedures through the Admissions Sub-Committee, which had identified, and responded to, some potential discrepancies in the application of central policies.

Complaints and appeals

2.6   There are clear and appropriate policies and procedures to manage complaints and appeals and these are well documented in student handbooks and clearly signposted online and through the Student Charter.

2.6.1   There are two stages to the complaints procedures, an initial informal stage and a subsequent formal stage where there is no satisfactory resolution at the informal stage. Academic appeals are governed by a separate procedure, the use of which is reported and monitored separately from complaints. The University observes its stated time frames for responding to complaints and appeals.

2.6.2   Students confirmed they were confident that they would be able to navigate the complaints procedure and could identify the main sources of information and support, including personal tutors and the Students' Union's Advice and Representation Centre.

2.6.3   Personal tutors are provided with training and support to advise students on the application of academic complaints and appeals policies (see also paragraph 4.6).

2.6.4   The University monitors the effectiveness of complaints procedures at a strategic level, with reports on formal complaints and those received by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator considered by Senate. There is no central monitoring of informal complaints, though schools are advised to hold records of these. The University plans to create a system for ensuring policy on informal complaints is followed routinely in schools and is collated for monitoring.

Career advice and guidance

2.7   The University has a clear approach to career education, information and guidance and takes steps to ensure that it is appropriately reviewed and evaluated. The strategic driver for the University's approach to career education, information, advice and guidance is

embedded in *The Way Forward 2012-17* and is influenced by the University's work alongside the Higher Education Academy Wales *Future Directions* programme. The University's strategic approach includes aims to increase work-related learning options, to increase the provision of 'languages for all' and to provide structured opportunities for students to review their own employability skills (see also paragraph 4.7). In addition to the provision of bespoke employability projects, such as the Cardiff Award, the team saw evidence of good examples of enterprise embedded within the curriculum.

2.7.1   Students confirmed that they had the opportunity to access careers information and advice through the central Careers and Employability Centre or through specialist support in their schools.

2.7.2   Staff are supported by the Careers and Employability Centre to guide students in discussions around careers, with an extensive range of central resources, including briefings and seminar templates for staff to adapt.

2.7.3   The University monitors the implementation of its employability strategy through regular action plans, user groups and feedback summaries produced by the Careers and Employability Centre and considered by schools as part of the ARE process. There is regular consideration at a strategic institutional level of national datasets, and information on destinations of graduates is made available to students through the Key Information Sets.

Supporting disabled students

2.8   Steps are taken by the University to ensure that the entitlements of disabled students are met. The implementation of the University's procedures for supporting students with disabilities is led by the Disability and Dyslexia Service, supported by the Student Support Centre and monitored at a strategic level by the Equality and Diversity Committee.

2.8.1   Personal tutors receive advice and training to help them support students with disabilities and to help them to identify appropriate routes for support. Staff are made aware of relevant University policies as well as broader legislative responsibilities, and they are given clear and practical examples of ways in which these responsibilities can be implemented.

2.8.2   Information regarding support, diagnostic screening and academic examination adjustments is clearly signposted for students through the Disability and Dyslexia Service. Support is provided centrally through the Disability and Dyslexia Service and through designated school advisers.

Supporting international students

2.9   The University provides support to prospective and current students through the International Student Support team, who provide information, advice and guidance pre-admission and through the enrolment process. There is an established Induction Programme for new international students, on completion of which support for international students is subsumed by other central service teams. The effectiveness of induction arrangements is actively monitored and reviewed through the collection of student feedback and wide consultations.

2.9.1   The students met by the team confirmed that admission and induction arrangements met their expectations and that they benefited from the considerable support provided by the International Student Support team.

2.9.2   The University runs in-sessional English language support for targeted international students, including school-based support and central online resources.

2.9.3   The University makes use of student feedback provided by the International Student Barometer, which reflects the University's high international student satisfaction for the International Student Support services.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.10   The University has in place appropriate support and guidance to enable postgraduate research students to complete their programmes. Staff supporting postgraduate research students are appropriately supported to fulfil their responsibilities.

2.10.1   The postgraduate research (PGR) experience is centrally facilitated by the University Graduate College (UGC). The UGC provides support and training programmes across a wide spectrum of activities, including teaching support and general and specific research skills. The UGC links with the Cardiff Researcher Programme to support early career researchers. The University has a clear structure of training and support for PGR supervisors, with a supporting framework including school-level Directors of PGR studies. Directors meet as part of the PGR network at both College and University level to encourage interdisciplinary engagement and engage in thematic away-day events. Directors of Postgraduate Research Studies are responsible for ensuring supervisors of PGR students in their school are appropriately prepared.

2.10.2   The ASQC has recently revised the code of practice for research degrees and procedures for the conduct of research degree examinations to reflect *Chapter B11: Research degrees* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

2.10.3   The institution has a range of approaches to capture the PGR student voice. The senior body in this arrangement is the PGR Student Representatives Forum which is supported by the UGC and attended by PGR representatives from across the University. The chair is an elected student who sits on the UGC Board. The Forum meets twice a year, ahead of a UGC Board meeting, into which outcomes may feed.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.11   The processes and procedures for managing the quality of learning opportunities delivered as part of a collaborative arrangement mirror the University's standard approach to quality assurance for its campus-based provision. Collaborative arrangements are managed effectively.

2.11.1   The University has extensively revised the policies and processes around collaborative provision, having identified this as an area of potential high risk and possible future development. The revised Collaborative Provision Policy Framework was revised in December 2013 and has been mapped against *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the Quality Code. The University has also created new structures to support collaborative provision to allow any expansion in this area to be well supported. The team saw no evidence of any cause for concern in this regard, but the University will wish to exercise appropriate caution in managing any significant growth.

2.11.2   The ASQC established, in 2007, a Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee to ensure appropriate attention was given to collaborative activities. The Sub-Committee provides a well structured system for the recording of the management of partnership activities. Developments have included the construction of a family of template agreements to suit different types of new arrangements. A comprehensive register of collaborative arrangements is in place.

2.11.3   The team saw evidence of prompt and effective handling, reported at School Undergraduate Board of Studies, ASQC and Senate of potential collaborative provision quality and standard issues.

2.11.4   The University's normal ARE process (including external examiner input) provides the core approach to the monitoring of quality and standards in collaborative arrangements. Collaborative Provision Moderators are academics from a school other than that coordinating and supporting that partnership provision. They provide an independent view of the quality of collaborative provision operations and demonstrate an extra level of oversight applied to collaborative provision. The team saw evidence of this mechanism working effectively.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.12   There are relatively few credit-bearing higher education programmes that are delivered entirely by distance learning. This mode of delivery is largely restricted to parts of programmes. There is a small suite of online postgraduate taught programmes in the allied health area. The team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities in this area are being managed effectively.

2.12.1   The University established the Virtual Learning Environment Group in 2009 which overviews the quality management of the online learning platform and related technology-enhanced learning resources. This group reports to the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Student Experience and Academic Standards and to the Education and Students Policy Network.

2.12.2   All distance learning programmes are approved and reviewed by the standard University processes.

2.12.3   Distance learning students have the same opportunities to evaluate their learning experiences as on-campus students and the same access to personal and academic support. The enhancement theme around educational technology, including lecture capture and enhancements to the virtual learning environment, is expected to benefit distance learning students (see also paragraph 4.10).

Work-based and placement learning

2.13   The University has recently updated its Code of Practice on Placement Learning which sets out expectations and responsibilities and is mapped to align with the Quality Code. A majority of placement learning opportunities are in health and allied fields, where sector codes of practice and PSRB requirements define close oversight. The team saw and heard evidence that the management of placements was satisfactory and that students felt supported while on placement.

2.13.1   Oversight of non-clinical placement learning is considered through a placement learning survey introduced in 2013. This indicated a 93 per cent satisfaction level with placements. It is planned to run the survey on an annual basis with the outcomes integrated into Annual Review data dashboards.

2.13.2   *The Way Forward* incorporates an ambition to ensure all schools provide opportunities for work-based experience as an integral part of the strategic approach to employability. The team heard that colleges and schools were developing plans in this area.

Student charter

2.14   The student charter was created in 2011 and covers all students of the University. It is reviewed on an annual basis by the Students' Union with the University.

2.14.1   The student charter website contains detailed signposting to complaints and appeals policies and procedures.

2.14.2   Student awareness of the charter is raised through a number of channels, including the Students' Union social media outlets and by plastic credit card style cards distributed during registration. Survey responses indicated that 70 per cent of undergraduate students, 60 per cent of postgraduate taught students and 58 per cent of postgraduate research students 'were aware' of the charter, although few had visited the student charter microsite on the main website.

3   Information about learning opportunities

Summary

The information about learning opportunities produced by Cardiff University **meets UK expectations**. The intended audience finds the information about the learning opportunities offered is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

3.1   The University produces a wide range of web and paper-based public information, which the team concluded had undergone sufficient quality assurance processes to ensure it was accurate and comprehensive. The main information sources for intending students are the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses, the web, and the Course Finder portal hosted on the University website. Together with a suite of linked publications, these provide information on individual courses, student support facilities, student finance, accommodation, open days and Cardiff city and region.

3.2   The prospectuses are reviewed and republished annually. Information is provided by schools and professional support services to the office of the Director of International and Marketing who, working with the web team, provides final editorial approval. College Heads of Communication are increasingly taking on a coordinating role and working directly with the web team. The prospectuses and related information are published separately in English and Welsh.

3.3   Web information for international applicants offers general guidance on the University's position on various national qualifications, the applications process, pre-arrival information, induction and English language programmes. This information is available on an individual country-by-country basis. There is a specific University prospectus for the international market.

3.4   Students found these materials to be accurate, wide-ranging and helpful, and noted that they had generally improved in recent years. Nevertheless the University has embarked on a three-year web transformation project to reduce the number of web pages, improve site navigation and rationalise web management. Some students reported access problems, and not all international students found the information to be easily accessible. However, the international students met by the team advised that further information was readily and helpfully available on direct contact with the University.

3.5   The team noted that there was lack of clarity among some staff concerning the responsibility for the oversight of information published by collaborative partners about the

University and its courses. Although no problems were identified in this area, the University may wish to assure itself that this responsibility is clearly identified and communicated to appropriate internal staff.

3.6   There is a direct link on each course-related page of the Course Finder to the UNISTATS website that displays the KIS information required by *HEFCW Circular 11/27*. This includes the proportion of the course available in Welsh. Each University individual course web page also includes the main KIS information headlines. Accuracy of the KIS data supplied by the University is signed off by the Vice Chancellor.

3.7   Students confirmed making use of course handbooks, which were helpful, and up to date. The handbooks viewed by the team varied considerably in design, style and content. ASQC has undertaken an analysis of all School Handbooks, and has prepared, for implementation from the start of 2014-15, generic text to be used as the basic information for all handbooks for undergraduate modular programmes. Handbooks for PGT and PGR students show similar levels of inconsistency. It is the University's intention to produce PGT and PGR Student Handbooks following approval of the final text for the non-modular Undergraduate Handbook.

3.8   Following course completion, the University provides appropriately sealed and signed bilingual Degree Certificates and Transcripts that meet the requirements of the Quality Code. The Transcript also includes, as an appendix, a helpful summary of the higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. ASQC has recently approved a revised certificate for candidates studying at a partner institution whereby the partner's name and location is included in the certificate and transcript.

3.9   The Quality and Standards section of the University's internal website acts as a quality manual for staff involved at various levels of the quality assurance processes. It provides clear guidance on programme approval and management, monitoring and review, academic regulations, assessment, student engagement, working with others, postgraduate research and the University's various external reference points. The manual reflects the Quality Code clearly. Staff also indicated that additional help was readily available from professional support services colleagues.

3.10   From December 2013, all external examiner reports, including the name and institution of the examiner, are available to students on the Student Voice webpage, with a helpful summary of the roles of the examiners.

3.11   The University takes seriously its responsibilities for the promotion of the Welsh Language through the development of opportunities for students to study in Welsh and through the implementation of its Welsh Language Scheme.

3.12   The development of courses delivered in Welsh falls within the remit of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Student Experience and Academic Standards, and has been supported by the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (the Coleg), which was established in April 2011 to take an overview of Welsh language provision in Wales and to support its development. The University is represented on the Coleg's Board of Directors and its Academic Board. The Coleg has funded 10 academic posts for the University and an eleventh shared with another Welsh university, together with four university research scholarships. Students reported positive experiences of learning in Welsh, but many noted that the provision of modules in the Welsh medium was inconsistent and demand from students in some disciplines was low.

3.13   The University's revised Welsh Language Scheme, approved by the Welsh Language Commissioner in March 2014, falls within the remit of the Chief Operating Officer and aims to actively promote the principle that the Welsh language will be treated no less favourably than the English language when dealing with the public in Wales. Staff

development opportunities are encouraged through arrangements for participants in the PCUTL (see paragraph 2.1.2) programme to submit their teaching portfolios in Welsh and to receive feedback in Welsh from colleagues with direct experience of teaching in the Welsh language.

4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at Cardiff University **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1   Enhancement is a key element underpinning the University's strategy set out in the document *The Way Forward 2012-17,* which is focused on improving the quality of students' learning opportunities. The overall aim is to ensure that Cardiff graduates are 'flexible, articulate and highly employable'. The approach outlined in *The Way Forward 2012-17* has informed the University's enhancement activities since 2012, and has continued to influence the scope and shape of projects initiated since its publication.

4.2   Six university-wide enhancement activities have together underpinned the University's approach to enhancement. These are: refreshing the personal tutor scheme; reviewing and enhancing professional services that support students; implementing the Assessment Matters and Proving Excellence Projects in the session 2013-14; ensuring that the Continuing Professional and Personal Development (CPPD) programme is cost effective and provides access to other appropriate programmes; enhancing opportunities for language learning and intercultural awareness to facilitate student mobility and employability; and ensuring the curriculum is developed and refined regularly, especially in relation to diversity and inclusion, international mobility and work experience.

4.3   These specifically institution-wide enhancement initiatives have informed priorities at school and college levels, and are overseen by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Student Experience and Academic Standards. The team learned that the CPPD programme is under constant review for cost effectiveness and fitness for purpose, and is likely to be strengthened by its location in a new Learning Enhancement Unit that will lead all learning and teaching support (See paragraph 2.1.6). The professional services generally and the priorities for the specific student-focussed services are currently undergoing realignment to best fit the further implementation of *The Way Forward* strategy.

4.4   The Proving Excellence project was completed in May 2013 and resulted in the adoption of a single monitoring process (Annual Review and Enhancement or ARE) to replace three previous processes, and a single periodic review process, each of which is supported by centrally provided data and evidence (See also paragraphs 1.4.3 and 1.4.4). The new arrangements have strengthened the link between quality assurance and enhancement. In completing the ARE form, school boards are required to identify practice that the school considers to be 'sector-leading' and worthy of wider dissemination within the University, and 'effective practice' that the school would like to highlight for possible wider dissemination. Academic staff welcomed the adoption of the new ARE process.

4.5   The Assessment Matters project, which was established in 2011, is expected to be formally signed off by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Student Experience and Academic Standards in June 2014 (See also paragraphs 1.3 and 1.3.1). However, a number of the recommendations within the project have already been adopted by Schools. Staff reported that while they found the implementation of a number of the project's recommendations to be challenging, its adoption had encouraged debate, contributed to greater consistency in assessment processes and practices, and had encouraged enhanced feedback to students.

4.6   The Pro Vice-Chancellor for Student Experience and Academic Standards established a task and finish group to complete the review of the Personal Tutor Scheme, which was developed through the Education and Students Policy Network and approved in principle at ASQC in January 2014 for implementation from 2014-15. The revised arrangements will provide students with a more consistent experience; focussing on the provision of academic advice and referrals to specialist support services; and enhance personal tutor training opportunities and related resources. Students whom the team met reported variable practice and quality of experience.

4.7   The Languages for All initiative, due to commence in October 2014, is designed as a sector-leading opportunity for all Cardiff students to study a foreign language, at no additional charge, at a range of appropriate levels. It derives in support of the aspiration in *The Way Forward 2012-17* that at least 17 per cent of its students will have at least four weeks studying, working or volunteering abroad, although participants in Languages for All will not be restricted to such students. The recently established Global Opportunities Centre provides wider support for the mobility theme in *The Way Forward* by assisting academic schools in implementing the University's international mobility strategy and in attaining University and College targets, working directly with students to facilitate study exchange programmes, and generally administering mobility programmes.

4.8   More generally, the University has strengthened the link between the quality assurance processes and the enhancement of the students' learning experiences, and is moving to a culture of continuous improvement and enhancement with a clear understanding of the relative roles of schools, colleges and the University centre in the management of the related processes. The college deans are required to produce a report on enhancement activities following the ARE process.

4.9   While the regular monitoring and review of the curriculum provides opportunities for colleges and the University to monitor progress in enhancing opportunities for work experience and international mobility, the Inclusive Curriculum Project, which was completed in 2013, focused specifically on ensuring that students with special support needs, particularly disabilities, are able to fulfil their learning outcomes effectively. The team noted that further university-led enhancement projects had been identified since the publication of *The Way Forward*. Staff and students reacted positively to these, in particular the timetabling and lecture capture projects, with elements of the latter already being established in some Schools.

4.10   The University's commitment to the continuous enhancement of student learning is exemplified by the recent decision to embark upon a key three-year multi-million pound project, Education Portfolio of Change. The overall aim of 'enhancing academic delivery and student learning experiences' is linked to specific student satisfaction targets. Under the leadership of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Student Experience and Academic Standards, the programme seeks primarily to extend the use of technology to enhance learning and to place the University at the leading edge in this regard.

4.11   The University has not developed an overview report specifically on enhancement, although enhancement activities are regularly reported to Senate, ASQC and UEB. However, the University has adopted the practice of preparing an Annual Fee Plan Report to Students, which highlights recent enhancements that impact on the student experience, around the theme of 'how my student fees are spent'. The team **affirms** the University's decision to produce an annual review of enhancement from 2014-15.

4.12   The team concluded that the various projects and their adoption were a clear sign of the University's strategic approach to enhancement. The projects were visibly led and championed at executive level. Staff were fully aware of the projects and appreciated the

benefits of their implementation to student learning, although the outcomes of the Assessment Matters project have taken some time to be widely embraced. The practice of monitoring regularly at University executive level the progress of key university-wide strategies for the enhancement of learning opportunities is a **feature of good practice**.

Glossary

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

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:
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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

Flexible and distributed learning
A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.
See also **distance learning**.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

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

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

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