



# Gateway Quality Review: Wales

## Centre for Alternative Technology

March 2022

### Key findings

#### **QAA's judgements about the Centre for Alternative Technology**

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the Centre for Alternative Technology:

- **There can be confidence that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable.**
- **There can be confidence that the quality of the student academic experience meets relevant baseline regulatory requirements.**

#### **Areas for development**

The review team did not identify any **areas for development**.

#### **Specified improvements**

The review team did not identify any **specified improvements**.

## About this review

The review visit took place from 21 to 22 March 2022 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Paul Brunt
- Ms Diane Rainsbury
- Dr Harry Williams (student reviewer).

The overall aim of Gateway Quality Review: Wales is to:

- provide the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales with an expert judgement about the readiness of a provider to enter, or continue to operate within, the higher education sector.

Gateway Quality Review: Wales is designed to:

- ensure that the student interest is protected
- provide expert advice to ensure that the reputation of the UK higher education system is protected, including the protection of degree standards
- identify development areas that will help a provider to progress through a developmental period and be considered 'established'.

Each review considers a provider's arrangements against relevant aspects of the baseline regulatory requirements, and in particular:

- the reliability of degree standards and their reasonable comparability with standards set and achieved by other providers
- the quality of the student academic experience, including student outcomes where the provider has a track record of delivery of higher education.

## Impact of COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the review was conducted online and included meetings with the senior management team, teaching and support staff, and students. The scope of the evidence considered, and the nature of the judgements and operational milestones have remained the same but with some adjustments due to the online format. During the pandemic QAA has continued to review its arrangements for delivering online reviews in order to identify and mitigate any risks.

## About the Centre for Alternative Technology

The Centre for Alternative Technology (the Centre) is an internationally-renowned environmental charity, a world-leading eco centre and leading provider of postgraduate environmental education. Its mission is to inspire, inform and enable humanity to respond to the climate and biodiversity emergency. Established in 1973, it is located in Machynlleth in mid-Wales, and has been delivering education for over 40 years in the field of sustainability.

All the higher education delivered by the Centre is based in its Graduate School of the Environment. The Centre's strategy for the Graduate School for 2020-25 is to maximise the School's impact by increasing its student recruitment, widening its student base and broadening its range of courses while maintaining its high-quality student learning experience. There are plans in the next five to 10 years to provide additional training facilities to support skills for the future.

There is a range of postgraduate degrees covering environmental issues and solutions that are validated by either the University of East London (UEL) or Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), as well as a wide variety of short courses. Since the Centre's previous QAA review, the Centre has validated two additional master's programmes with LJMU - Sustainability and Behaviour Change, and Sustainability and Ecology - and more recently, the MSc in Green Building validated by UEL. The other current master's programmes are:

- M.Arch in Sustainable Architecture
- MSc / PGDip / PGCert in Sustainability and Adaptation
- MSc / PGDip / PGCert Sustainability and Adaptation in the Built Environment
- MSc / PGDip / PGCert Sustainability and Adaptation Planning
- MSc / PGDip / PGCert Sustainability in Energy Provision and Demand Management

With the introduction of these new courses, the student head count for 2021-22 has risen to 239 (108.5 FTEs) compared to a headcount of around 100 at the time of the previous review. The Centre has responded to increasing student numbers and impact on resources, particularly during the Covid pandemic, by increasing its staff resource and IT provision to meet the needs of distance studying. The Centre has no further plans to increase student numbers having reached the physical capacity of the site until accommodation and training facilities are added under the Centre's future development plans over the next five to 10 years.

One of the attractions for students studying with the Centre has been the opportunity to study onsite with modules block delivered in a blended approach. One of the key challenges now facing the Centre is how to meet student expectations for an onsite experience within ongoing Covid restrictions and the return to safe onsite teaching.

The Centre previously underwent a successful QAA Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) in 2017 and received commended judgements for the quality of student learning opportunities and the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The review team identified five features of good practice. No recommendations or affirmations were made.

## Judgement area: Reliability and comparability of academic standards

### ***The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)***

1 Ultimate responsibility for setting and assuring academic standards resides with each of the two validating universities - University of East London (UEL) and Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU). There are detailed agreements and regulatory frameworks setting out each partner's responsibilities and the Centre is meticulous in adhering to the regulations and quality assurance requirements including those relating to marking and moderation, programme development and approval. Programme specifications demonstrate that programmes are set at the appropriate academic level with clearly-defined learning outcomes aligned to the FHEQ.

2 The Centre's consistent application of its awarding body processes, including arrangements for marking and moderation, and the consideration of appropriate external reference points, demonstrate comparability and consistency in the standards of awards and achievements of its students. External examiners' reports confirm courses meet threshold standards set out in the FHEQ and standards achieved are comparable with equivalent programmes and sector-recognised standards. The staff whom the review team met talked knowledgeably about the expectations and mechanisms for maintaining standards.

### ***The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)***

3 All awards are validated either by the UEL and LJMU respectively with the Centre's programmes subject to the academic frameworks and regulations of these validating universities. Hence, any requirement to follow the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* is not mandatory with programmes being required to align with the FHEQ. However, while not a strict requirement in terms of awarding body requirements, the Centre applies CQFW's common values and higher principles by embedding them within its policies and practices.

### **The Core and Common practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)**

**Core practice: The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.**

4 The Centre works with two awarding bodies, each having ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of their awards. Under its validation agreements, the Centre has full responsibility for programme development, delivery and assessment, ensuring that its programmes are appropriately designed and aligned to relevant qualification frameworks. The Centre's responsibility for programme design includes the specification of learning outcomes and alignment to FHEQ within the overall parameters of the awarding body with those bodies having ultimate responsibility for ensuring compliance with national qualification frameworks. The clarity of these arrangements ensures that, providing these are followed, programmes will meet the requirements of the relevant national qualification frameworks.

5 In designing new programmes, the Centre works within the parameters and programme templates specified by the relevant partner university. Programme specifications clearly set out the learning outcomes are aligned to Level 7 of the FHEQ, the Master's Degree Characteristics Statement and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Due to their

interdisciplinary nature, not all programmes fall within the scope of a single Subject Benchmark Statement and, instead, the Centre designs and maps the programmes against relevant elements of several Subject Benchmark Statements. Programmes, such as the M.Arch Sustainable Architecture, are also subject to the detailed sector standards of the professional body with evidence of detailed mapping of learning outcomes and curriculum against these professional body requirements.

6 External examiners confirm that threshold standards are consistent with the national qualifications framework and that standards are only awarded where such standards have been met and in accordance with awarding body regulations.

7 There was evidence that where the Centre has delegated responsibility, threshold academic standards are consistent with the relevant national qualification framework. Staff demonstrated a close working knowledge of those requirements to maintain academic standards and how they were applied to their operational practice in terms of programme design, delivery and its assessment.

**Core practice: The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.**

8 The Centre demonstrated consistent application of awarding body processes including marking and moderation in conjunction with the consistent application of relevant external reference points. University processes are complemented by the Centre's own assessment criteria descriptors comprising generic master's assessment criteria level descriptors and assessment rubrics. These tools are used to ensure consistency and comparability across the assessment of programmes in terms of threshold standards and application of the various grading criteria at different levels of performance.

9 Staff talked knowledgeably about expectations for maintaining standards, the application of detailed marking criteria, support and the guidance available to students, as well as the role of developmental and summative feedback to enable students to achieve. The team learnt that it was relatively common for students to seek and obtain further guidance on how they could improve further on their overall attainment.

10 External examiner reports provided sound evidence of the marking and moderation processes being correctly applied in practice and confirmed students had the opportunity to achieve beyond the threshold standard.

**Core practice: Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.**

11 The Centre works within the terms of the Memoranda of Agreement and policies and regulatory frameworks of its validating universities. These are comprehensive and set out in detail the respective responsibilities of each partner.

12 The Centre is responsible for programme development, designing and setting assignments at the appropriate level, and conducting marking and moderation in accordance with the processes of the validating university's academic framework regulations. The universities' suite of regulations and associated processes provide the necessary framework for ensuring that standards of awards are credible and secure.

13 The Centre supplements the regulatory guidance from its validating partner universities with its own processes and policies including a Quality Assurance Handbook,

Graduate School Assessment Principles, Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures, and master's grade descriptors. During the visit, the team learnt that the Centre negotiates adjustments and further contextualisation of policy particularly where this involves the wider adoption of a specific best practice from one of its validating partners across all its programmes.

14 There was sound evidence of effective compliance with the universities' regulatory requirements and quality assurance processes with external examiners affirming that student work is comparable with sector standards, and that the standards of awards are credible and secure. Staff also demonstrated effective working knowledge of their role in maintaining standards and the various processes in discharging their own responsibility and the requirements of their partner universities. The Centre has effective mechanisms in place to ensure staff maintain up-to-date knowledge of the requirements of the university including dissemination through Academic Council, the Head of School and regular programme committee meetings, that supplements the effective liaison through the University Link Tutor system.

**Core practice: The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.**

15 The Centre follows the assessment policies and procedures of its validating universities prescribed in their academic regulations and frameworks including the requirements governing second-marking and moderation, and the role of external examiners. The Centre has several assessment policies and processes - master's assessment criteria-level descriptors and the Assessment Rubric - that complement and appropriately align to the requirements of its awarding bodies. The Centre has adopted its own policy and processes relating to academic integrity while assignments are submitted through plagiarism-detection software. These processes ensure student work is marked fairly and consistently, at the correct academic level and in accordance with the programme learning outcomes and underlying criteria.

16 The assessment methods, criteria and standards students are expected to achieve are clearly set out in relevant programme documentation. Students confirmed that the module guides were their principal source of reference which they found clear and comprehensive. They also confirmed that academic staff provided a high level of support.

17 Students receive a combination of formative and summative feedback in accordance with university policies. The team noted that summative feedback is provided through an electronic report which provides detailed annotation against the assessment rubric and incorporates overall feedback. A number of students commented that there were instances, particularly when they received a high grade, when it was not clear from the feedback how they could improve. While the review team was satisfied that students received feedback, it recognised the Centre's acknowledgement of the need for continuing engagement with students to help their understanding of the reporting format and the application of the assessment rubric.

18 External examiner reports provided affirmative evidence and positive feedback on the application of relevant university processes for marking, moderation and classification with academic standards and student achievement being comparable with FHEQ standards and comparable master's programmes. External examiner reports provide confirmation that assessment and marking are consistent and fair, with marking and moderation processes being followed meticulously.

19 External examiner reports are accessible to students through the validating body's virtual learning environment (VLE) with responses to such reports shared and discussed with

students through the course monitoring process. Notwithstanding the effectiveness of such processes, students whom the team met were unclear where they might access external examiner reports. The team suggests there might be scope to consider how to reinforce further signposting of where this information is made available.

20 The Centre has well-established processes for considering and responding to external examiner reports, starting with the initial response plans and more detailed action plans that are considered iteratively through annual programme review, consideration at programme committee and, ultimately, through Academic Council that has ultimate oversight responsibility within the institution. Staff were fully conversant with these processes including the external's role in assuring and maintaining academic standards and the wider contribution of external expertise in supporting programme development and assessment.

21 The Centre also makes use of external expertise through the employment of guest and visiting lecturers as part of programme delivery and assessment, the use of external expertise in programme development and the universities' formal approval and periodic review processes.

**Common practice: The provider reviews its Core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.**

22 The Centre operates within the policy and procedural frameworks of its awarding bodies to discharge its responsibility in maintaining academic standards. The annual programme monitoring processes are effective in driving improvement and enhancement through clearly-defined action plans. Progression and completion data is routinely reviewed as part of the annual programme monitoring process together with the outcomes from external examining and any professional body outcomes. Student feedback is integral to the process. Data and outcomes from module feedback is also used throughout the year as a means of securing continuous improvement.

23 The Centre has effective management and deliberative governance processes to drive improvement and enhancement. The Academic Council has oversight of the overall health of programmes and academic standards, routinely considering the outcomes from a wide range of evidence to address issues and stimulate improvement and enhancement. This is completed at a more operational level through regular programme committee meetings to respond to feedback and issues as they occur.

## **The Expectations for standards of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)**

24 The Centre works with two awarding bodies which have ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of the awards. Under its validation agreements, the Centre has full responsibility for programme development, delivery and assessment, ensuring that its programmes are appropriately designed and aligned to relevant qualification frameworks. Staff demonstrated a close working knowledge of these requirements to maintain academic standards and how they were applied to their operational practice. External examiners confirmed that threshold standards are consistent with national qualifications framework. Overall, the clarity of these arrangements and the evidence provided by the Centre demonstrated that programmes meet the requirements of the relevant national qualification frameworks.

25 The review found that the Centre is meticulous in adhering to the regulations and quality assurance requirements of its awarding bodies. Through the Centre's consistent application of its awarding body processes - including arrangements for marking and moderation, and the consideration of appropriate external reference points - the Centre

is able to demonstrate comparability and consistency in the standards of awards and achievements of its students. The Centre takes account of relevant sector-recognised standards through consideration of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, the Characteristics Statement for Master's degrees and professional body requirements. The value of qualifications awarded to students are confirmed by external examiners who confirm threshold standards are consistent with the national qualifications framework and standards are awarded in accordance with awarding body regulations.

26 The review team concluded that the Centre is effective in the delivery of Core and Common practices and maintains the standards of the awards, thereby meeting the Expectations for standards of the Quality Code.

## Judgement

27 In order to reach the following judgement, the review team was able to explore a wide range of documentary evidence, including a self-evaluation document; and the review team was able to meet with a wide range of staff and students, including staff from the awarding bodies. The meetings and documents allowed the review team to see robust evidence which demonstrates that the academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications frameworks (*The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and the Expectations, Core and Common practices for standards as set out in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education); and that the qualifications awarded are in line with sector-recognised standards.

28 The review team concludes that there can be **confidence** that academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable.



## Judgement area: Quality of the student academic experience

### The Core and Common practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)

#### Core practice: The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.

29 The Centre's Admissions Policy outlines a fair, transparent and equitable approach to the recruitment of students. Information relating to the provider's curriculum, fees, and terms and conditions are available via the Centre's website. Operationally, the Head of the Graduate School is responsible for overseeing the admissions process with support from the Student Support Team and relevant programme leaders.

30 There are appropriate arrangements in place to allow students without formal qualifications but relevant and appropriate knowledge and skills to demonstrate these. These students may apply for either the recognition of prior learning (credit) or the accreditation of experiential or certificated learning, according to the policy of the relevant awarding partner. A small number of students have been admitted onto programmes via these two routes.

31 There is an appeals procedure in which unsuccessful applicants may appeal the outcome of an application with further information on this provided in the Admissions Policy. During the online visit, the review team heard that where applicants could not be placed on their desired programmes, alternatives could usually be found - for example, enrolment on some of the Centre's short courses.

#### Core practice: The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.

32 Agreements with the awarding bodies show they are responsible for the approval and modification of programmes, with the Centre being active in developing the provision. The design of programmes is a shared responsibility between the awarding bodies and the Centre, and the Centre is responsible for proposing module modification. The Centre considers new programmes and programme modifications within its deliberative structures and works with the relevant awarding body for approval. Proposals are aligned to appropriate reference points, and external expertise is sought to review course proposals, and new or revised modules. New course proposals are formally considered at Academic Council, and the evidence demonstrates the Centre's effective engagement in programme design.

33 The Academic Council is the key strategic level group for quality and higher education development, and scrutinises the effectiveness of the Centre's quality systems. The Academic Council is effective as the means for which high-quality delivery is evidenced, and this is achieved through its oversight of the annual review processes (including examiner reports), student feedback, and the ongoing monitoring of data.

#### Core practice: The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.

34 The Centre employs sufficient suitably qualified academic and support staff for the student population. While the awarding bodies are not involved in recruitment, they do have final right of approval of new academic staff appointments, and support the Centre with teacher accreditation and other development opportunities. Staff new to teaching are mentored and supported in their role. The Centre has a comprehensive staff development

policy, and the staff development committee meets twice a year to determine the allocation of funds to support staff development requests. Staff have opportunities to participate in research and scholarly activity and feel supported in their development.

35 Staff benefit from the entitlement for short course participation run by the Centre, and broader general professional updating and training courses are provided. Continuous professional development opportunities are identified via annual peer review activities, and development requirements feature in annual peer observations and staff appraisals. Students report that they experience high-quality teaching, and this is evidenced in their evaluations.

**Core practice: The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.**

36 Availability of appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support is considered during programme approval, reflected in handbooks and programme specifications, and subsequently monitored through annual monitoring processes and student feedback. The Centre has bespoke physical resources onsite, but all courses are offered through blended delivery mechanisms, with access to a VLE, and the awarding body library. Students report that all documentation, handbooks, announcements, lectures, reading materials, timetables, assessment information, policies and deliberative meeting information are readily available. The Centre has a well-established personal tutor system, provides an appropriate range of student support and welfare services and there is additional access to awarding body resources. The resource needs of the student body are suitably reflected in the Centre's policies and procedures.

**Core practice: The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.**

37 The Centre does not have an overarching strategy with respect to student engagement; however, there is an established student representative system with student representatives embedded on high-level committees, including Academic Council. Representatives also attend Programme Committee meetings, which occur quarterly. The Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) meets on a monthly basis and provides a further opportunity for staff to respond to student feedback on modules.

38 Students also provide feedback at feedback meetings, which take place at the end of every onsite module week. These are typically held as face-to-face meetings or by videoconferencing to allow for remote participation. Students may also provide onsite written feedback anonymously at the end of each onsite teaching week. At the end of each academic year, there is an appraisal of student feedback by academic staff during a two-day staff meeting.

39 During the online visit, students and student representatives confirmed to the team that the Centre is always keen to hear student feedback and work together with the student body to improve the student academic experience. Importantly, student representatives provided several examples of where student feedback has led to positive changes at the Centre.

**Core practice: The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.**

40 The Centre has a complaints policy that is fair and accessible. Students are encouraged to, wherever possible, resolve their complaints informally but, where this is not possible, the Centre has a clear process by which their complaints can be addressed. After

exhausting internal procedures, students may request an external review by their awarding body and, if they are still unsatisfied, they may then appeal directly to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for HE (OIA).

41 There is a requirement for the Head of the Graduate School to report annually to the Board of Trustees and quarterly to Academic Council on any formal complaints received: the number, at what stage they were satisfactorily addressed, and the number proceeding to external review. Annual statements provided by the OIA show that there have been no referrals to the OIA since the last QAA review.

42 Academic appeals are dealt with by the relevant awarding body and are therefore not considered or handled by the Centre.

**Core practice: Where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments.**

43 The Centre does not offer research degrees. This Core practice, therefore, does not apply.

**Core practice: Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.**

44 In relation to course delivery, the Centre does not collaborate with organisations other than its awarding bodies; therefore, this Core practice does not apply.

**Core practice: The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.**

45 The Centre takes several steps to support their students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes. Key to this is the Student Support Team, who assist students with enquiries and administrative matters and may also liaise on their behalf with their awarding body. All students are allocated a personal tutor who provides academic and pastoral support throughout their studies. The Centre has recently also subscribed to the Employee Assistance Programme, and this provides 24-hour access to free and confidential counselling to both the Centre's staff and students.

46 There is a clear emphasis on employability with many of the Centre's programmes designed to fill skills gaps in Wales but also further afield. The Centre does not have a careers service in the traditional sense but does encourage its students to make use of the careers service of their awarding body. There is significant use of external speakers, and the Centre routinely organises networking events and communicates job opportunities via the VLE. During the online visit, the Centre highlighted their emphasis on project-based work which allowed their students to develop both academic and professional skills.

**Common practice: The provider reviews its Core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.**

47 The Centre has arrangements well-embedded for monitoring and review. The management of quality is structured around two key committees - Academic Council and Programme Committees. Among the terms of reference, Academic Council is responsible for academic standards, learning and teaching strategy, enhancement and dissemination of good practice, and oversight of annual review processes. Programme Committees are responsible for overseeing the annual review of the programme and programme leaders present reports to Academic Council, with actions which are monitored via a school-wide accessible action plan. In addition, student-staff liaison committees report to programme

committees on teaching and learning matters, and address issues as they arise.

48 Annual Assurance reports with accompanying action plans are submitted to the CEO and considered at Academic Council, and awarding bodies require additional regular reports to be submitted, supported by their dedicated link tutors. All reviews include forward looking improvement action plans and opportunities to enhance the student experience, and staff gave numerous examples of these. Student representatives report high levels of satisfaction with the opportunities to express their views. Reviewers felt that the Centre reviews its Core practices for quality regularly and demonstrably uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

**Common practice: The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise.**

49 The Centre takes account of external expertise through the use of independent review of programme proposals and external panel expertise in the approval activities of the awarding bodies. Some of the Centre's programmes are also subject to external scrutiny of professional body activity. The external examiner system is managed by the awarding bodies, and is a key source of external expertise. Examiner reports are considered by programme teams and responses show they draw on their expertise and input. Analysis of examiner reports feature in the annual monitoring processes, and are responded to formally. The Centre identifies the benefits to the delivery of the learning experience of external speakers who contribute their professional expertise to enhance student experience, and live briefs are common practice in assessments.

**Common practice: The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.**

50 While the Centre does not have an overarching strategy with respect to student engagement, the team heard several examples of the provider engaging its students in the development and enhancement of the student academic experience. For example, moving assessment deadlines so that submission dates on different modules are less clustered together as well as providing feedback on module content which, ultimately, led to the module being revised for the next student cohort. This, in addition to the formal student representative structures in place at the provider, which are explored in more detail under the relevant Core practice, led the team to conclude that the Centre does engage students both individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.

## **The Expectations for quality of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)**

51 The Centre's courses are closely aligned with skills gaps in Wales but also further afield. The academic regulations of the Centre's two awarding partners are fully implemented, providing a basis for the assessment of student achievement. The quality of the student academic experience is confirmed at validation events and monitored via established annual review processes. The Centre employs sufficiently qualified academic and professional support staff and encourages staff to continually develop their professional competencies. The review team concludes, therefore, that the courses delivered by the Centre are well-designed, delivered and supported by appropriate staff, and therefore provide a high-quality student academic experience.

52 The Centre is committed to supporting their students to achieve good outcomes. All programmes are delivered in a blended-distance mode of learning. There is significant use,

therefore, of the Centre's two VLEs. All lectures are recorded and provided to students afterwards. These new capabilities, driven partly by the COVID-19 pandemic, have allowed more students from more diverse backgrounds and locations to achieve positive outcomes at the Centre. Students are supported throughout their programmes by named personal tutors and a dedicated Student Support Team. During the online visit, the team heard repeatedly from students and student representatives that the Centre's academic and professional staff were friendly, courteous and always willing to help. There is a significant use of student achievement and destination data which shows that, overall, students are achieving positive outcomes. The review team, therefore, concluded that from admission to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.

## Judgement

53 In order to reach the following judgement, the review team was able to explore a wide range of documentary evidence, including a self-evaluation document; and the review team was able to meet with a wide range of staff and students, including awarding-body representatives. The evidence allowed the review team to explore the provision offered to students from the point of admission through to completion. The review team was able to see appropriate arrangements for admissions; evidence demonstrating effective engagement in the design and delivery of high-quality courses; appropriate quality and skilled staff in the delivery of high-quality teaching; availability of appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support; and active individual and collective engagement with students. These practices allowed students to succeed in, and benefit from, higher education. The evidence enabled the review team to see that the provision meets the Expectations, and the Core and Common practices for quality as set out in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

54 The review team concludes that there can be **confidence** that the quality of the student academic experience meets relevant baseline regulatory requirements.

## Commentary: Welsh Language Standards

55 As the Centre is neither a public body nor does it receive any statutory funding, it is not under statutory obligation to comply with the *Welsh Language Act 2011*. However, as an organisation it appreciates the importance of the Welsh language and is currently in the process of developing a Welsh Language Progress Plan in collaboration with the Welsh Language Commissioner. While this is still in a relatively early stage, the Centre demonstrates a commitment to promote the Welsh language.

56 The Centre has already taken several steps to demonstrate compliance with the relevant Welsh Language Standards, including welcoming correspondence in either English or Welsh and then replying in the language of the original correspondence. Where the Centre hosts a conference, meeting or event, should there be sufficient demand, simultaneous translation is provided. During the online visit, the team heard that staff are encouraged to learn Welsh and in the near future will have time incorporated within their contracts to enable this going forward. Students are similarly encouraged to learn Welsh and several students reported that there was money available to support them taking lessons.

57 The Centre's programmes are validated by England-based higher education providers, and under the terms and conditions of the relevant course validation documents, programmes must be delivered in English. The Centre is keen nevertheless to increase the number of Welsh-speaking staff and, to achieve this, all job advertisements are now advertised in both English and Welsh and, furthermore the ability to communicate in the medium of Welsh is now identified as a desirable characteristic.

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