



# Quality Enhancement Review of Wrexham Glyndŵr University

## Technical Report

March 2019

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*This report is published in both English and Welsh.*

## About the Quality Enhancement Review method

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

## About this review

This is the Technical Report of the QER conducted by QAA at Wrexham Glyndŵr University. The review took place as follows: First Team Visit on 11 February 2019 and Review Visit on 11-14 March 2019. The review was conducted by a team of four reviewers:

- Professor John Baldock
- Dr Christine Jones
- Professor Andrew Rogers
- Matthew Kearns (student reviewer).

In advance of the review visits, the provider submitted a self-evaluative document (the Self-evaluative Analysis), a change report and an advance information set, comprising a range of materials about the provider's arrangements for managing quality and academic standards.

## About this report

In this report, the QER team makes judgements on:

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

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

Technical Reports set out the QER team's view under each of the report headings. A shorter Outcome Report sets out the main findings of the QER for a wider audience. The Outcome Report for this review is on the QAA website.<sup>3</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> About QER: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/quality-enhancement-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/quality-enhancement-review)

<sup>2</sup> About QAA: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us)

<sup>3</sup> Outcome Report: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/Glyndwr-University](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/Glyndwr-University)

# Overarching judgement about Wrexham Glyndŵr University

Wrexham Glyndŵr University **meets** the requirements of the ESG Part 1 for internal quality assurance.

Wrexham Glyndŵr University **meets** the baseline regulatory requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales.

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

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

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

1 Wrexham Glyndŵr University was originally established as the North East Wales Institute of Higher Education in 1988, although it had pre-existed as a series of colleges, including the former Wrexham School of Science and Art dating back to 1887.

2 The University's mission is to 'inspire and enable; transforming people and places and driving economic, social and cultural success'. In 2018, Wrexham Glyndŵr University published a new Vision and Strategy to 2025, which has four domains:

- teaching that inspires
- research that transforms
- engagement that enables
- structure that sustains.

3 The Vision and Strategy to 2025 aims to enable inspirational learning and excellent teaching through continuously reviewing the curriculum, developing flexible and accessible learning, optimising student retention and achievement, and working with students as partners. The University's Vision and Strategy to 2025 is underpinned by 14 supporting strategies, including a Strategy for Supporting Student Learning and Achievement (SSSLA), a Widening Access and Participation Strategy, an Employability Strategy and a Research Strategy.

4 In 2014, several key senior staff left the University and following a period of interim leadership, a new executive team has been in place since 2016. Similarly, retirements and subsequent new appointments means the University has a different Board of Governors. These changes gave rise to the new Vision and Strategy to 2025, underpinned by several supporting strategies.

5 Since the last review, the University has reconfigured its academic schools, most recently into two faculties in 2018 - the Faculty of Arts, Science and Technology, and the Faculty of Social and Life Sciences. The faculties have identical leadership structures, with an Executive Dean supported by four Associate Deans with responsibilities respectively for: i) academic affairs; ii) student engagement; iii) enterprise, partnership and employability; and iv) research.

6 The Vice-Chancellor and their executive team are responsible for the management of the University, reporting to the Board of Governors. Academic affairs are reported to a series of committees with ultimate oversight for quality and standards taking place at Academic Board. In July 2017, the Board of Governors established a Quality and Standards

Scrutiny Panel (QSSP) to evaluate the work of Academic Board and advise the full Board on signing annual assurance statements relating to quality and standards for the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). The QSSP is discussed further at paragraph 79.

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

7 The University has approximately 2800 undergraduate students, mostly full-time, and 230 postgraduate students, with about half studying full-time and half part-time, plus several thousand other part-time students. Total student numbers declined since 2013-14 principally because of a decrease in the number of international students.

8 The University enrolls 45% of its students from the local region. A high proportion of students are from areas where participation in higher education is typically lower, a high proportion of students disclose a disability with over 26% of students receiving a Disabled Students' Allowance in 2016-17 and over 70% of the University's students in recent years are classified as mature students. Overall, 88.9% of students fall into one of these three categories.

9 The University tracks retention rates closely (see paragraph 61) and has a Retention Working Group that reports to its Access and Retention Group. Actions resulting from the Working Group correlate with increased student retention from 84.2% in 2015-16 to 85.6% in 2017-18, and a steady increase in progression from 78.9% in 2013-14 to 83.9% in 2017-18. The percentage of students receiving a first class or 2:1 in their first degree has also increased in recent years to 68.2% in 2017-18.

## **1.3 Commentary on how the provider supports national priorities**

10 The University launched a Civic Engagement Strategy for 2018-21 with detailed actions designed to increase active citizenship and volunteering, engagement with public service boards, supporting schools and young people, innovation and social capital through Innovation Hubs, and ensuring that these actions have a tangible impact. The University seeks to meet regional skills needs by working with the North Wales Economic Ambition Board to map its courses against the Regional Skills and Employment Plan. It also engages closely in development related to the North Wales Growth Deal in order to explore how it can support its aims.

11 A Widening Access and Participation Strategy sets out the University's commitment to raising the aspirations of prospective students and providing appropriate support for higher education entry and success in order to address gaps in participation. This informs not just an annual Fee and Access Plan to HEFCW, but the development and design of the University's educational portfolio and student support services. Specific actions include working in partnership with schools and colleges to establish progression agreements, promoting the support available to students leaving care and who are carers, and providing short-course opportunities that build the confidence and skills of prospective students that enable them to access higher education.

12 The University has worked in partnership with the Students' Union to enhance students' mental health and support those with mental ill-health. This included externally funded suicide prevention training for staff and students, which enables those staff and students in turn to train others, and the promotion of a Health and Wellbeing calendar. Such work is complemented by student counselling and welfare support service including mental health mentors.

13 In support of the Welsh Government's strategy to increase the use of the Welsh language, the University has a Welsh Medium Academic Development Plan. The number of students studying some credits through the medium of Welsh has increased, albeit from very low initial numbers in 2015-16. The University engages closely with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and has appointed a Welsh Medium Champion to further develop its educational offer. For instance, the Welsh Medium Champion participates in 'SHAPE' - a process to enhance the development of programmes prior to validation (see paragraph 68).

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

14 Preparations for the review were led by a Working Group established by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (LTQC), comprising members from the Students' Union, each academic area, and professional support staff, and co-chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Academic Registrar. Further sub-groups were established to map the University's procedures against both the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the European Standards and Guidelines 2015. Together, the University and Students' Union agreed to develop a joint Self-evaluative Analysis, written in sub-groups, with parts co-authored by the Students' Union and reported to committees which have Students' Union representation, including LTQC, Academic Board and the Board of Governors.

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

15 The University proposed three areas of focus on the basis of their integral role in the SSSLA. Two areas of focus are strands in the SSSLA - innovative assessment and students as partners. The third area of focus concerns the effectiveness of the distributed approach to the implementation of the SSSLA.

16 Innovative assessment was chosen as an area of focus because it has already been an enhancement area for the University in 2017-18 and the subject of considerable activity. Data analysis revealed considerable variation in students' satisfaction with assessment and feedback, and that students with a disability were less likely to progress or achieve a first or a 2:1 degree. In response, the University took steps to share more widely within the institution, the good practice from programmes with high student satisfaction for assessment and feedback, and to make assessment more accessible and inclusive. This is discussed further at paragraph 93.

17 Students as partners was chosen as an area of focus because it was considered an area of strength and had also been recently enhanced through the establishment of an independent Students' Union. Students as partners is also a key objective of the SSSLA.

18 The focus on the effectiveness of the distributed approach to the implementation of the SSSLA was chosen as a novel approach to the management of quality. The approach uses an Academic Development Team and a network of 'Associates' from across the University to implement the strategy.

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

19 The University's response to recommendations from its QAA review in 2013 was evaluated by QAA in a Mid-process Student-focused Engagement in June 2016. The University had revised its external examining regulations to require that scripts are sampled from all delivery sites of a given programme. This is prompted in the external examiner report template, and Registry checks that sampling has taken place. The University addressed a recommendation to enhance resources at Glyndŵr University London by

relocating its premises and implementing a resourcing and staffing strategy, though this delivery site has since closed following the completion of studies by all London-based students. In light of a recommendation about identifying and addressing learning resource issues, the University has strengthened its Initial Programme Proposal Form to capture resourcing requirements, and annual monitoring procedures require Deans of Faculties to review resourcing issues and give them with devolved spending powers. Finally, the University has revised its Academic Quality Handbook to specify that external assessors should be members of validation panels, and sampling of validation reports confirms that this happens in practice.

20 QAA's Mid-process Student-focused Engagement in June 2016 had established that the University had met nine recommendations arising from QAA's review of Foundation Degrees in May 2013. However, some practice has changed since and it is no longer a requirement that employers participate in the validation of Foundation degrees. The Mid-process Student-focused Engagement also confirmed that the University had taken steps to address findings in QAA's Thematic Enquiry on London Campuses of UK Universities; the University closed its London campus after teaching-out programmes in June 2018.

21 The University continues work to address the recommendations arising from QAA's transnational education review of Hong Kong which had sampled the Hong Kong Management Association working partnership with Wrexham Glyndŵr University.

### **1.7 Details of the provider's responsibilities for the higher education it provides on behalf of the degree-awarding bodies it works with**

22 While the University awards taught degrees, it works in partnership with several other organisations to deliver higher education. The University has delivered research degrees on behalf of the University of Wales since 1993. In 2013, the two universities agreed to end the validation arrangement once all registered students have completed their studies. A sub-committee of the University's Research Committee gives specific oversight to students on University of Wales degrees, to ensure they continue to be aligned to the University of Wales' Common Academic Framework.

23 Since 2015, the University has worked with the University of Chester to deliver MPhil and PhDs in accordance with Chester's Principles and Regulations. Numbers of enrolled students have increased steadily from 10 in 2015-16 to 42 in 2017-18. Monitoring reports for the University of Chester are considered and approved by Wrexham Glyndŵr University's Research Committee. The Research Committee also has a sub-committee specific to University of Chester students which acts as an assessment board. In 2018, a partnership periodic review recommended the further renewal of the partnership for five years to 2023. The University's Research Strategy plans a conservative approach to growing research student numbers, with a target of a 5% increase per year up to a maximum of 80 students by 2022-23.

24 The University has a licence from Pearson to offer Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Diplomas (HNDs) which it does mainly in partnership with further education colleges, including Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Coleg Cambria (both delivering four HNCs). The University directly delivers two HNDs.

## 2 Enhancing the student learning experience

### 2.1 Strategic approach to enhancing the student experience

25 The University's approach to enhancing the student learning experience is primarily 'top down' and strategically driven but it also allows for ground-up initiatives prompted by staff and students. The strategic framework is set by the University's overarching Vision and Strategy and its 14 supporting strategies, particularly the SSSLA which was developed during 2017 through processes of consultation and discussion with students, staff and external stakeholders such as local employers.

26 The SSSLA has five priority actions: a relevant curriculum; 'great teaching'; innovative assessment; personalised support; and students as partners. The Academic Board has overall responsibility for enhancement while operational development is led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and closely monitored by the LTQC. The University identifies an annual enhancement theme which is systematically developed and monitored through the establishment of special cross-University working or task and finish groups. The most recent and planned annual enhancement themes were: Assessment and Feedback 2017-18; Digital Capability 2018-19; Employability 2019-20, with some themes spanning multiple academic years. The review team heard evidence from staff and students of their participation in developing and implementing these annual themes.

27 The University has developed explicit mechanisms for communicating, monitoring and evaluating its strategic enhancement initiatives. It uses the 'ADRI model' of continuous improvement (approach, deployment, review and improve) to focus particularly on organisational change in the University's learning and teaching methods. In 2014, the University closed its central educational development unit and, from 2016, developed a new cross-University system for supporting organisational change in learning and teaching. The core Academic Development Team (ADT) is led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and consists of the Associate Deans for Academic Affairs and the Associate Deans for Student Engagement from both faculties together with a university-wide network of academic and professional services staff who have volunteered to become ADT 'Associates'.

28 The ADT and associates have worked collaboratively in teams focused on a range of organisational projects including: transforming assessment and feedback; employability; technology-enhanced learning; digital capability; HEA Fellowships and Peer Observation of Teaching. The ADT mechanisms for developing and supporting enhancement projects are described by the University as a distributed model of responsibility for change, based largely on volunteerism rather than hierarchical authority.

29 The review team explored the effectiveness of ADT mechanisms for implementing the SSSLA and achieving change, and examined a range of sources and data on student support, engagement, retention and progression. While these outcomes are broadly positive, based on the evidence, the team decided that it was too early to draw definite conclusions on the effectiveness of the ADT mechanisms in achieving enhancement objectives. Staff met by the review team, while positive about the changes that had been introduced, also considered it too soon to measure the outcomes. What was clear to the review team were the high levels of student and staff awareness of, and support for, enhancement, the SSSLA, and the changes that had been made, particularly in assessment and feedback and personalised support for student learning. The University leadership described its overall approach as designed to change the institutional culture to one that focused systematically on the enhancement of the student learning experience and it was clear that staff were enthusiastic about the current strategies and plans, and that the students were very aware of positive changes. This finding supports the commendation at paragraph 62.

## 2.2 Approach to working in partnership with students

30 The University has developed the involvement of students in the management of learning and teaching in two main ways. Firstly, the capacity and autonomy of the Students' Union have increased since the former Students' Guild became an independent union with charitable status in 2016. The increase to its block grant from the University has allowed it to increase its number of professional staff from two to eight, and to provide a greater range of services including management of the student course representation system, an Advice Centre and the employment of a Welsh-speaking student adviser. Secondly, the University's Student Engagement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy has defined how the University supports and enables students to engage with, and participate in, quality assurance and enhancement activities and provide feedback on their student learning experience from admission to graduation. One indication of the significant role that the elected Students' Union officers play in the management of the student learning experience is their contribution to the University's Self-evaluative Analysis for its review which was written jointly with the Students' Union and which contains a section of 14 pages, for which the Students' Union was the lead author, describing how the University and the student body jointly work together.

31 The students are represented by their elected officers, usually the Students' Union President and the Vice-President, on the principal governing committees of the University, including the Board of Governors, Academic Board and the two Faculty Boards. Student representatives can be members of programme validation panels and act as representatives on panels for complaints, student discipline and appeals. Students are represented on over 20 of the University's key decision-making bodies. It was clear from meetings with the elected student officers that they have a comprehensive understanding of how the University is managed and can present a student perspective to governors and senior managers.

32 The course representation system, run by the Students' Union since 2016-17, provides student representatives at programme level and as members of the Faculty Boards. The Students' Union provides training for student representatives both face-to-face and online and was on course to train at least 75% of all representatives. At the time of the review, all programmes had chosen at least one student representative, as had been the case for 2017-18. The main way in which course representatives present the view of students is by attending Student Voice Forums, which meet at least once each semester for each programme.

33 Course representatives can also present students' concerns more directly by arranging meetings with Programme Leaders, and the Faculty Deans or Associate Deans. However, a significant route for student views since November 2017 is provided by the online systems known as 'Ask Glyn' and 'Tell Glyn' which enables students to communicate directly and almost immediately with Programme Leaders, student representatives and relevant professional services staff. Students also complete the Student Evaluations of Modules (SEMs), an online feedback questionnaire administered after the first three weeks of teaching and at the end of the delivery of each module, which inform the University's management of modules and programmes. The response rates to the SEMs had increased markedly over the last year and were frequently in excess of 80%. SEM data is considered as part of the annual monitoring process.

34 The University provides students with accessible and effective routes for voicing any questions or complaints they have about teaching and about learning resources and support. The findings of the annual Student Voice Reports from the Students' Union to LTQC, and comments from students met by the review team, confirm a wide range of opportunities for student feedback and that this information is considered systematically by the University. However, the principal mechanisms at faculty-level mainly gather learner



feedback and do not necessarily amount to engaging students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience, and the management of programmes and learning resources. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to work with taught students as partners in the co-development, management and evaluation of their student experience.

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

35 High proportions of students at Wrexham Glyndŵr University are from groups under-represented in higher education and those likely to face difficulties in accessing and engaging in education. HESA data for 2016-17 show that the University had the greatest proportions of students from low participation neighbourhoods and first-time entrants from state schools, out of all universities in the UK; and was second in the UK for the number of students receiving a Disabled Student Allowance (DSA). The student population also contains large proportions of mature students, students who are care leavers, and those who are vulnerable to personal, social and economic difficulties that may hinder their participation and progress. The 2017 Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide identified the University as the most socially inclusive in the UK.

36 The composition of the student population is partly a consequence of the University's geographical proximity to areas of low higher education participation in east and north east Wales, and also a consequence of its deliberate and successful recruitment activity designed to reach and support applications from disengaged young people, economically inactive adults, and those living in areas of high deprivation. The University's Fee and Access Plans demonstrate both its distinctive recruitment objectives and its achievements in attracting students from under-represented groups, and in supporting employability and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act goals.

37 The University has responded to the diversity of its student population through its strategic commitments to an inclusive culture free from discrimination and by focusing its policies and plans particularly on student attendance, retention, continuation and progression. Performance against specific targets in these areas is monitored at every Board of Governors and Academic Board meeting and every three weeks by the Vice-Chancellor's Board. Detailed oversight of provision focused on identified groups of students is provided by a special sub-committee of Academic Board: the Access and Retention Group, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. Once the detail of the students at risk is known, it is flagged with the Deans of Faculty and Associate Deans to ensure that targeted intervention is undertaken. The review team also received evidence of the accessibility of counselling, advice and employability services provided by the University's Student and Campus Life Team. The meetings with students confirmed that they could readily access a full range of support services.

### **2.4 Postgraduate taught and research student experience**

38 The University does not have its own research degree awarding powers but registers and supervises research students under partnership arrangements with the University of Wales and the University of Chester. The awards available to students are MPhil, PhD and Professional Doctorates. Significant proportions of the registered research students are University staff and/or are studying part-time.

39 The partnership with the University of Wales was established in 1993 but in 2013 the universities agreed to close the arrangement and no new University of Wales students enrolled from the academic year 2013-14. Existing students have continued to be supervised

and supported in accordance with the University of Wales procedures. In 2017-18 there were 34 students preparing for University of Wales awards and this number is expected to decline steadily.

40 In 2015, the University agreed a partnership arrangement with the University of Chester and enrolled its first students in January 2016. In 2017-18, there were 42 students registered under this arrangement. The partnership with the University of Chester received a positive Partnership Periodic Review in 2018 and was renewed for a further five years.

41 Slightly different arrangements for the regular monitoring of student progress and annual reporting are required and followed for the two sets of students of each respective awarding body. At the time of the review these procedures were paper-based, with reports of each meeting between students and their supervisors submitted to the Wrexham Glyndŵr University's Research Office and then considered by the University Research Degree Sub-committees for each of the two awarding bodies. At the time of the review, the University was planning to introduce an online reporting and monitoring system from the beginning of the 2019-20 academic year.

42 Both the research students and the supervisors met by the review team were confident that any problems in their supervision or progression would be quickly noted by the Research Office and reported to the Research Committee and the Associate Dean for Research for the relevant faculty. The Associate Deans also review the Annual Monitoring Reports on the progress of each research student. All research students have access to the same academic and research resources and these included a part-time Researcher Development Tutor appointed in April 2016, whose assistance in obtaining or applying for research resources or funding was praised by the students.

43 In April 2018 the University had received a report on 'Postgraduate Research (PGR) Provision at Wrexham Glyndŵr University' from an external academic. The report commended some areas including: the 'Open House for Researchers' meetings where students can present their current work; the support provided to students by the PGR support staff; and the commitment of individual supervisors involved in that review. However, the external expert made ten specific recommendations and indicated a range of areas for improvement, many of which were relevant to the student experience. The matters highlighted included travel and conference funds for PGR students; difficulties in taking account of the student voice and engaging with students; difficulties in benchmarking PGR feedback and progression against the sector; the PGR induction processes; and the sufficiency of the research environment available in some areas.

44 The University set up a task and finish group to consider the external report and prepared its own report and recommendations for the University Research Committee in October 2018. The review team was told that these recommendations, which largely concerned processes affecting PGR students such as induction, supervision, and the provision of space and resources, were accepted by Research Committee and either had been or were being addressed. It was also agreed that ongoing monitoring of student feedback would be a necessary component of managing the student experience.

45 The review team saw and heard no direct evidence of supervisory problems or lack of resource support for research students. It was apparent that there was limited participation by PGR students in the opportunities available for students to provide feedback about their student experience, which include the framework of their contacts with their supervisors and their use of the Tell Glyn facility. PGR students have a single representative on the Research Committee and the current representative had only recently been appointed to the role. There is a second representative for staff who are registered for research degrees. The University had arranged Student Voice Forums (SVF) for research

students but on the last two occasions only one student had attended. An online SVF was subsequently arranged during 2018 but only one response was received and that was from a completing student who was entirely complimentary. The Research Committee had reviewed the option of reintroducing the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey as a way of obtaining and benchmarking research student views and satisfaction but had decided, in January 2019, that the cost of its use per student registered (currently £76) outweighed the benefits. The last available report on the outcomes of the University's internal feedback questionnaire for research students dated from June 2017. 45 students had responded. While satisfaction with supervisory teams (90%) and research skills training (76%) was high, significant minorities of students had expressed concern about the research environment, academic resources and physical resources. A further internal online survey, which opened in June 2018 and closed in February 2019, was still to be analysed and would be reported to the Research Committee in May 2019. However, the breadth of the survey would be limited by the fact that only 25% of students had fully completed it. The annual monitoring forms returned for students of both validating universities do include feedback from individual students, and where this is of generic relevance, it is considered and acted on by the Research Committee. In the context of the Expectations *B5* and *B11* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the existing recommendations from the external review of PGR provision, the ongoing work to address them, and the intention of the University to apply in due course for research degree awarding powers, the review team **recommends** that the University intensifies its efforts to obtain systematic feedback from and engage its PGR students. In this context, the University should ensure the timely evaluation of feedback for consideration by the Research Committee and review the mechanisms it uses to encourage both the students' participation in opportunities for feedback and in designing actions in response.

## 2.5 Supporting students in their development as learners

46 As noted in paragraph 29, the University has articulated and disseminated a clear strategy for supporting student learning which is well understood and appreciated by both students and staff. The SSSLA, developed jointly with students in 2017, sets out clear objectives which are monitored through the use of an action plan and targets are reviewed regularly by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (LTQC). The distinctive features of this approach were recognised as strengths in the Teaching Excellence Framework 2017 Statement of Findings, which particularly mentioned course design, assessment practices and work-based learning, which ensure a curriculum relevant to regional employers. The SSSLA is closely allied with the University's Employability Strategy and Action Plan: 85% of programmes involve credit for work-related learning and a third of the curricula is recognised by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs).

47 Learning and teaching take place in the context of a student population of which 88.9% of students are from low participation areas (POLAR3) and/or are mature students and/or receive a DSA. The evidence seen and heard by the review team demonstrated a central focus on increasing retention by supporting attendance, achievement and progression. Data provided by the University show significant improvements in retention and progression since 2015-16, although the rate of improvement has slowed over time. A core method for supporting student attendance, progression and continuation has been a focus on 'personalised support', one of the five priorities of the SSSLA, tailored to the needs of individual students.

48 The University's approach to the provision of personalised support is multi-faceted and comprehensive. It includes: ready access to individual advice and guidance, whether online or in person; additional confidence-building modules to prepare learners new to or returning to higher education; electronic attendance monitoring that allows the University to respond rapidly to student absences; an enhanced and well-understood personal tutorial

system that is integrated with academic and professional services open-door access to teaching staff; a clear whole-institution approach to assessment and feedback; universal use of e-submission and electronic feedback to students; a virtual learning environment (VLE) that has enabled blended learning and the provision of online materials across all programmes.

49 These are methods of learning support that are widespread across the higher education sector but often introduced in ways that are disjointed and poorly understood by significant proportions of students and staff. The review team focused particularly on testing the evidence that these innovations were understood by students and staff and found that they were actually working to increase student engagement. The University had made available detailed evidence of action plans and outcome monitoring across all the areas of change management and these allowed the review team to interrogate claims and see clearly what had been achieved and where further gains were expected. For example, the review team saw and heard evidence that academic staff were readily available to advise students, applying the 'open-door policy', and that personal or technical help such as counselling or IT guidance and support were accessible and effective.

50 The review team found good evidence that the University has been successful in using its small scale, the new two faculty system and the Academic Development Team (ADT) distributed approach to realising change, to introduce substantial improvements to student learning over a relatively short time. Not all outcome targets had yet been reached, but the review team **commends** the deliberate and effective monitoring and support of individual students in a personalised way to facilitate their academic development.

## **2.6 Learning environment provided, including the use of technology**

51 The University systematically addresses learning resource needs in its annual planning round. Key objectives are set out in the *Estates and Learning Environment Strategy: Campus 2025*, and in a Learning Resources and IT Action Plan. At the time of the review visit, digital capability was the institutional enhancement theme of the year and a University Digital Strategy had been developed through cross-institutional consultation with students and staff. The University has, in recent years, focused on developing the staff resources needed to support the personalised support objectives as set out in the SSSLA, and it is likely this had contributed to significant rises in National Student Survey (NSS) results for Academic Support and Advice and Guidance questions. In contrast, the most recent NSS scores for Learning Resources (77%), while improving on previous years, were still below the sector average for Wales (86%). However, the review team found investments had been made to upgrade teaching rooms and equipment and a cycle of refurbishment was ongoing.

52 It was notable that, in a University with a high proportion of applied programmes requiring technical facilities and equipment, the students met by the review team were consistently positive in their comments on access to specialist equipment and technical support. In the most recent NSS results, the positive response to the question 'I have been able to access course-specific resources' had risen from 75% to 80%. The review team saw evidence that the University had made significant progress in effective use of cloud-based lecture capture and the VLE for teaching and learning, supported by VLE mentors for training staff and Digital Learning Facilitators to assist students and staff in each of the two faculties. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students spoke to the review team positively about the assistance available from the Information Desk in the library and the readiness to purchase access to books and other resources, frequently in response to student comments on Tell Glyn. The University was close to its target of 80% of teaching staff achieving Higher Education Academy Fellowship status and participation rates in staff development events were high.

## **2.7 Supporting the Welsh-medium student learning experience**

53 At a strategic level, the University sets out a definite commitment to Welsh language higher education provision in its Vision and Strategy, which is supported by its Welsh Language Policy. Additionally, the SSSLA has specific targets for Welsh-medium provision. The recent appointment of a Welsh Language Champion, who works with the faculties in the development of Welsh-medium opportunities, is a further positive development. A Welsh Language Academic Development Plan, monitored by the Access and Retention Group, outlines key priorities in relation to the SSSLA targets. The development of Welsh-medium academic provision has appropriately been separated from managing compliance with the Welsh Language Standards, which are overseen by the Welsh Language Monitoring Committee. The review team were encouraged to see that the SHAPE process considers future strategic opportunities in relation to programme development and the Welsh language (SHAPE: Supporting a Holistic Approach to Programme Enhancement, see paragraph 68).

54 A further positive development has been the establishment of a branch of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (CCC) in 2017-18, with the position of Branch Officer funded by the CCC. The role of the Branch Officer is to develop a community for Welsh-medium students at the University and encourage them to take up Welsh-medium learning opportunities. The role was vacant at the time of the review team visit, however, staff had found the role of the CCC Branch Officer very useful in terms of developing students' confidence in their use of Welsh.

55 The Welsh-medium undergraduate students met by the review team felt adequately supported in their studies noting that they were able to have a Welsh-medium personal tutor if they wished and highlighting the availability of Welsh-medium placement and Welsh-medium practice coordinators, which they greatly appreciated. The University provides Welsh-speaking placement mentors in certain subject areas. Where lectures are not available in Welsh due to limited demand, the University provides some opportunities for students to discuss their work in Welsh in subject areas that have Welsh speaking staff in place. Students can submit all assignments in Welsh and undertake examinations in Welsh and a helpful assessment guide is available in both English and Welsh summarising their entitlement in this regard. The Inclusion Services Team has a Welsh speaking Needs Assessor to enable needs assessments to be carried out through the medium of Welsh.

56 The SSSLA notes 37 students completed five credits in Welsh in 2017-18 and the target for 2018-19 is 60 students rising to 100 the following year. Two students completed 40 credits in Welsh in 2017-18 and the target for 2018-19 is 10. Students spoke favourably about opportunities to learn or improve their Welsh language skills, which were frequently advertised.

57 Evidence suggests that the increasing strategic commitment to the Welsh language is, therefore, enhancing the bilingual cultural ethos of the University and the opportunities for students. While numbers of Welsh speaking staff are small, ongoing developments are enriching the learning experience of Welsh-medium students.

## **2.8 Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience**

58 The University's approach to enhancing the student learning experience is effective, student-informed and student-focused. Over the last three years, the University has developed a Vision and Strategy focused explicitly on enhancement. Each of the 14 supporting strategies for different areas of activity is designed to be consistent with this overarching theme as well as addressing the economic and social priorities of North Wales

and the local cross-border region. Each strategy is accompanied by plans, which specify measurable outcomes that are regularly monitored through formal decision-making committees.

### 3 Supporting the enhancement of learning and teaching

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

59 The University has a clear approach to forward planning and the use of information to identify enhancement priorities. This approach is driven by the University's Vision and Strategy and supported by a series of underpinning strategies, which drive improvement across all areas of the University's provision. These strategies have clear, measurable and identifiable targets, which are effectively monitored, with each strategy having an individual action plan monitored and reviewed by a senior University committee. The use of benchmarking also further supports the identification and measurement of progress against key strategic objectives. The review team found that these strategies, although recently introduced, were embedded across the University and clearly understood by staff.

60 The University articulates its approach to forward planning, including the use of data to identify enhancement priorities, in its Enhancement Framework. There are clear mechanisms to engage students in this framework through the collection and consideration of student feedback through systems such as Tell Glyn. The University operates processes at faculty and institutional-level to systematically collate and consider qualitative and quantitative data to identify areas of good practice or areas for development which includes scrutiny of module evaluation data, external examiner reports, student retention, progression and achievement data and data on complaints. This approach, underpinned by the University's vision and associated strategies, reflectively use data to implement, monitor and evaluate enhancement initiatives.

61 The University makes particularly effective use of retention data to identify areas for enhancement, although the review team noted that much of this work is ongoing and it is too early to fully assess its impact. Retention data is reported every three weeks to the Vice-Chancellor's Board and monitored according to the reasons for withdrawal or suspension, with individual departments flagged for action if their retention data is below the University average. The Retention Working Group has a clear action plan, which is regularly monitored and updated, and staff illustrated a clear understanding of the steps being taken to improve retention, such as the revised attendance monitoring policy.

62 The review team found that the University's strategic approach to forward planning and enhancement was clearly articulated and understood across the University and effectively monitored through the University's committee system. The effective use of data and key performance indicators to monitor and evaluate the individual strategies effectively drives the University's approach to forward planning and enhancement and enables staff to celebrate successes and identify areas for enhancement at programme level. The review team, therefore, **commends** the articulation and dissemination of a comprehensive set of coherent strategies designed to support the enhancement of the student learning experience.

### **3.2 Approaches to managing change in approaches to learning and teaching**

63 The SSSLA acts as the key strategic driver of change in the University's learning and teaching practices and staff readily engage with it and understand it. The mechanism for change is the ADT and Associates Network, supported by evidence-based decision-making through the process articulated in the University's Enhancement Framework. The ADT's distributed leadership model comprises a core team supported by a network of Academic Development Team Associates.

64 The review team explored the effectiveness of this distributed leadership model and found that it successfully drives change and enhances learning and teaching. The ADT had enhanced considerably student learning opportunities; for example, the work undertaken on innovative assessment practice has led to several significant improvements such as the increase in modules using electronic submission and feedback. This positive impact was recognised and valued by students the review team met. Associates take ownership of their enhancement areas and are empowered to make meaningful change across the institution. The inclusion of professional support staff alongside teaching staff as Associates positively contributed towards the ADT's effectiveness in managing change in learning and teaching. The review team noted that in some ADT areas, such as the work concerning peer guiding and the planned work on the development of graduate attributes, progress was ongoing and, therefore, yet to fully generate a measurable impact on student's educational experience.

65 Learning lunches and the annual two-day staff conference function as additional mechanisms to implement and manage change in learning and teaching across the University, and staff met by the review team spoke positively of these activities and noted high attendance at such events since the introduction of the SSSLA. The review team, therefore, finds that the University has a clear strategy for managing change in learning and teaching and that this approach has generated a tangible positive impact on students' educational experience, while recognising that it was too early to fully assess the effectiveness of the full range of ADT and Associates work, some of which were ongoing.

### **3.3 Approaches to supporting innovation, identifying and sharing good practice**

66 The University operates clear mechanisms to support innovation and facilitate the sharing of good practice at programme, faculty and institutional-level. The SSSLA underpins the University's initiatives to recognise, support and reward good teaching practice and disseminate it across the institution. The restructuring of the University from four schools to two faculties has helped facilitate innovation through the mirroring of key quality and enhancement roles and regular communication between the faculties. Staff recognise that this creates opportunities to identify and share good practice across the institution more consistently and supports interdisciplinary engagements.

67 Key quality assurance processes such as Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) identify good practice through the effective use of data such as NSS scores, which are subsequently discussed at programme and faculty-level. Additionally, LTQC considers an Overview External Examiner Report. The University's Peer Observation of Teaching Policy supports staff in their professional development and successfully identifies good teaching practice. Staff met by the review team also spoke positively about how learning lunches provide a forum for both teaching and professional support staff to share innovative practice.

68 The good practice repository on the VLE and the recording of learning lunches helps disseminate good practice across the institution and can be accessed by the University's collaborative partners. Biannual staff awards provide an additional opportunity to

identify and celebrate staff engaged in innovative teaching practice. Staff identified the Supporting a Holistic Approach to Programme Enhancement (SHAPE) initiative as particularly helpful in supporting the design and development of new programmes and ensuring the University's curriculum design principles are systematically embedded across its provision. The Academic Development Team is a further mechanism through which innovative practice across a range of areas is successfully shared and encouraged, such as recent work undertaken in relation to assessment practice.

69 The review team considers that the University operates effective processes to enable the sharing of good practice across the institution and note the SSSLA has been key to driving forward initiatives such as learning lunches, which support and identify such practice.

### **3.4 Engaging, developing and supporting staff**

70 The University operates effective processes to engage and support the professional development of all staff. These processes are underpinned by its People Strategy and Staff Engagement Strategy. The University undertakes a Staff Engagement Survey every two years and the results of the most recent survey demonstrate the University's strong progress in addressing areas of development.

71 Annual Personal Development Reviews (PDR) support staff in reflecting upon their performance and their continuous professional development (CPD). Staff access a formal programme of professional development, including tailored packages for senior managers, programme leaders and new staff members which effectively supports them in their roles. Staff confirmed to the review team that they receive robust professional development support which facilitates their progression and that this support was aligned with the learning needs of the student body. For example, several staff members identified examples where they are able to access professional development opportunities to better support students with additional learning needs. Staff also receive training and support on areas linked to the ADT's enhancement themes, such as the VLE Essentials module, which supports the embedding of good VLE practice across the institution.

72 Initiatives such as the Developing Excellent Learning, Teaching and Assessment (DELTA) Fund, Staff Conference and Learning Lunches, effectively incubate and encourage innovative practice among staff and support the development of their teaching practice. Staff confirmed that they receive time to pursue research and publishing opportunities and engagement with CPD opportunities is effectively tracked and recorded to inform the PDR process. The University actively supports staff in seeking professional recognition and the SSSLA has a clear target to achieve 90 per cent of staff attaining professional recognition by 2020. It also supports staff to pursue doctoral degrees and develop their research skills with Personal Research Plans being rolled out across the institution. The review team, therefore, finds that staff are supported and engaged in their professional development through a wide range of mechanisms.

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

73 The University has implemented a robust and coherent set of strategies to facilitate the enhancement of learning and teaching, and that these strategies and the processes through which they are implemented, are well understood and actively engaged with by staff. There is evidence of a positive impact on the experience of both staff and students, such as the work undertaken on assessment practice which has led to a significant increase in the number of modules using e-assessment. This institutional approach to enhancement is monitored and evaluated effectively through the committees and persons responsible for the



success of the SSSLA. The SSSLA, therefore, operates as a clear strategic driver of change within the University. However, the team noted that it is too early to fully determine the impact of this approach, for example, in relation to retention, and this was recognised by staff the review team met. Overall, the review team is confident that the University's approach to enhancement articulated within SSSLA and Enhancement Framework will continue to operate effectively.

## **4 Academic standards and quality processes**

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

74 The University's approach to managing quality is structured around its Academic Regulations and the Academic Board Committees. The framework is robust and indicates definite lines of responsibility and accountability together with comprehensive processes for the management of quality. Appropriately, the Regulations are reviewed annually, to ensure continued alignment with the University strategies and the Academic Board approves any changes. There are several opportunities for student involvement in managing quality as set out in the Enhancement Framework and the Student Engagement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy, co-constructed by the University and the Students' Union. The means whereby students can contribute to the management of quality include external feedback mechanisms such as the NSS as well as internal mechanisms including Student Evaluations of Modules (SEMs), being a faculty representative, or a programme representative attending biannual Student Voice Forums (SVFs). In line with the University's developing focus on students as partners, students are represented on all key committees including the Vice-Chancellor's Board, the Board of Governors and the Academic Board and its sub-committees. Innovative Students' Union initiatives such as Tell Glyn provide further effective opportunities for students to provide feedback. The ways in which this feedback is used to enhance learning and teaching are discussed under Section 2.

75 The Academic Board is responsible for academic quality and standards and its membership is relatively broad, including both academic and professional staff from across the institution, together with two student representatives. The LTQC supports the work of the Board and has oversight and maintenance of the quality assurance framework. Minute extracts indicate the close and appropriate oversight of the LTQC in relation to this responsibility. Faculty Boards are responsible for the academic standards and quality of programmes within the faculties and appropriately include both undergraduate and postgraduate representation. Specialist working groups are established to focus on key areas in the management of quality and standards, such as the Working Group on Degree Regulations. The Assessment Review Group includes students, members of LTQC and members of the Academic Development Team Associates Network. The Assessment Review Group has developed, for instance, a generic marking rubric, which can be adapted for different programmes and assessments. Students told the review team that enhancements to assessment processes, including the generic marking rubric, had been very helpful.

76 An important feature of the University's approach to managing quality is the Annual Monitoring Review (AMR) process as outlined in the Academic Quality Handbook. The report includes an action plan for enhancement. Faculty Boards discuss AMRs and the sharing of good practice and an overview report, including collaborative partners' AMRs, is submitted to the Academic Programmes Sub-Committee to LTQC annually. Recommendations are actioned as required. Students contribute to the AMR process through the completion of the SEMs. A periodic review process is also held every five years,

with evidence indicating that students are key to the process through their participation in detailed discussions with the Panel in relation to the quality of their learning experience.

#### **4.2 Key features of the approach to setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards**

77 The University has comprehensive regulations and rigorous processes in place in relation to student attainment and the awarding of academic qualifications. The main mechanism for the setting and maintenance of academic standards are the programme approval and revalidation processes together with the use of External Examiners to confirm student attainment and consistency with external reference points. Chief External Examiners provide a valuable means of ensuring consistency across different subject areas. LTQC considers a detailed, analytical overview report of external examiner reports, which includes recommendations for future enhancement. Further, Academic Board discusses a degree outcomes comparative analysis and similar information is distributed to Faculties, thereby informing future strategy and policy developments and helping to ensure an equitable experience for all students.

78 The University's programme approval process has recently been reviewed and enhanced. Enhancements include increasing student involvement in the validation process and in 2017-18, 67% of validation panels included a trained student representative. A clear strategy is in place for increasing this number further. All validation panels include an external subject adviser. During the review visit, academic staff discussed a wide range of examples of relevant discussions with employers in relation to proposed programme changes. While programme validation is through LTQC normally for five years, minor changes to programme content mid-cycle are put to the Academic Programmes Sub-committee for approval. The process requires evidence that current and prospective students have been consulted about the changes.

79 The Board of Governors (BoG) established a Quality and Standards Scrutiny Panel (QSSP) in 2017 that includes a cross-section of Governors, some from a higher education background and others with no higher education background. The Panel scrutinises paperwork related to quality and standards from the Academic Board throughout the year. This includes an Annual Standards Overview Report provided to QSSP and the BoG at the end of the academic year, with progress updates on any matters of concern. Based on evidence received, QSSP submits a detailed report to the BoG, along with a recommendation regarding the submission of the annual HEFCW quality assurance statements. This two-tier process to aid assessment of evidence to support the submission of the annual statements appears thorough and effective.

#### **4.3 Use of external reference points in quality processes**

80 The Regulations, Policies and Processes are mapped against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and, in turn, the European Standards and Guidelines, as evidenced by a University mapping exercise. Members of validation panels receive a useful checklist and they are required to comment on 'currency with appropriate external reference points including the qualifications framework and any professional body requirements'. The University maintains a PSRB register and validation and accreditation evidence indicates an active and positive involvement with such bodies, in line with the University's employability strategy. Oversight of quality process on LTQC is aided by the inclusion of an external quality adviser to provide impartial advice and support.

81 The University is proactive in ensuring that all staff are kept up-to-date with regulatory requirements relating to quality and standards. For example, it provides relevant training in the academic quality frameworks including *The Framework for Higher Education*

*Qualifications* and the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales*, at appropriate times such as the start of the academic year or at induction, and it distributes Subject Benchmark Statements, when revised, to relevant parties. Similarly, the University actively encourages participation in external quality-related networking activities, for example, engagement in the AdvanceHE Degree Standards Project has enabled several University staff to participate in delivering its External Examiner Development Programme. The University also participated in the Universities UK Degree Algorithms Project.

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

82 The 2013 QAA Institutional Review reached four separate judgements of 'meets UK expectations' in threshold academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities, the information about learning opportunities, and the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The University's response to this review was evaluated through a QAA Mid-process Student-focused Engagement in 2016.

83 The review identified three features of good practice and the University took steps to further them. It further developed the delivery of e-learning, increased disability assessment and support arising from the increased number of students in receipt of Disabled Student Allowance (DSA), and redeveloped the KPI dashboard, integrating it into the programme annual monitoring and review processes.

84 The University's response to four recommendations from its QAA review in 2013 was evaluated by QAA in a Mid-process Student-focused Engagement in June 2016. The University had revised its external examining regulations to specify that scripts should be sampled from all delivery sites of a given programme. This is prompted in the external examiner report template, and Registry checks that sampling has taken place. The University addressed a recommendation to enhance resources at Glyndŵr University London by relocating its premises and implementing a resourcing and staffing strategy, though this delivery site has since closed once students there completed their studies. In light of a recommendation about identifying and addressing learning resource issues, the University has strengthened its Initial Programme Proposal Form to capture resourcing requirements, and annual monitoring procedures require Deans of Faculties to review resourcing issues and give them devolved spending powers. Finally, the University has revised its Academic Quality Handbook to specify that external assessors should be members of validation panels, and sampling of validation reports confirms that this happens in practice.

85 The University completed two affirmed actions, specifically concerning the sharing of external examiner reports with students, which now takes place at Student Voice Forums; and concerning student representation at its former London Campus.

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

86 The Strategic Planning Office, which includes a team specifically responsible for student data, quality and planning, is at the forefront of data collection and analysis. The review team heard how the Strategic Planning Office engages with relevant stakeholders across the University to develop the use of data in a range of ways to inform decision-making and to evaluate and improve performance.

87 Minutes of meetings demonstrate the extensive use of data in committee deliberations, with actions undertaken in relation to retention, recruitment, survey analyses and complaints. The Board of Governors is kept suitably informed through an end of year

key performance indicators progress report that encompasses annual targets related to academic provision and student experience. Data intelligence among staff is enhanced, where required, through continuing professional development.

88 The importance of data at programme level is evident in AMRs that consider the performance of programmes through usage of a 'traffic light' coding system/'RAG' rating, and supplementary analysis. This is an effective and efficient mechanism for recognising deviation from institutional benchmarks. Data-driven action plans focus on key areas such as recruitment, retention, NSS results and degree classifications. This process applies to both the University's programmes and those of collaborative partners, enabling a consistent and comparative approach. External examiners' reports, together with the responses from programme teams and SEMs, provide further examples of data used in academic monitoring and the consideration of academic developments. The SSSLA and subsequent action plan have clear data informed targets, such as the increase in SEM returns from a disappointing 15% in 2018 to 80% in 2019. The review team heard that early indications, based on semester one evidence, suggested that this target would be met.

89 Importantly, the University collects and evaluates qualitative as well as quantitative data, such as through the Student Voice Forums and Tell Glyn. An overview report of this data is discussed at key committees with actions taken forward by the University and Students' Union, as appropriate. The review team were told how qualitative data is of particular importance to professional support staff when considering how best to support the needs of particular students.

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

90 The University has an effective multifaceted approach to ensuring that the quality of the learning and teaching is enhanced. It has a clear commitment to continuous improvement through a cyclical process as outlined in the Enhancement Framework. For example, the annual review of the Regulatory Framework has resulted in a greater focus on early complaints resolution and the establishment of a Learning from Complaints Forum provides an excellent opportunity for sharing of good practice, reflection and further review. The annual monitoring, periodic review and validation processes are robust and detailed. Evidence suggests that the creation of SHAPE to discuss and offer advice on validation proposals, is enriching the validation process. The review team also heard from academic staff how the recent establishment of CREATE (Collaboration for Reviewing and Enhancing Assessment and Teaching Excellence) is effectively supporting the wider validation planning process. Aided in part by the new management structure, the revised Peer Observation of Teaching Policy encourages cross-faculty working, thereby widening enhancement and developmental opportunities.

91 The increasing opportunities for interdisciplinary professional dialogue are enhancing the approach to quality and this is also true of the developing focus on students as partners. The Student Engagement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy demonstrates the varied opportunities students have to provide feedback on their experiences. Engagement among postgraduate students, however, appears disappointing at present, as discussed at paragraph 45.

92 The document 'The Enhancement Framework in Practice' includes specific focused targets based on key data sets, and the increased focus on data sources is strengthening the effectiveness of the management of quality by the Academic Board and its committees, together with its interactions with the Board of Governors. The establishment of a monthly Retention Action Group, in light of the below benchmark continuation statistics for 2017-18 and the slight slippage in retention statistics for the same year, exemplifies such

management action. The University's enhancement theme for 2017-18 was assessment and feedback, and analysis of the 2018 NSS data suggest the positive effect of work undertaken in this area has put the University above its benchmark and the sector-average.

#### **4.7 Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards**

93 Section 4.2 summarises the regulations and procedures used by the University to set and maintain the standards of its awards. Externality is an important feature of the comprehensive approach, with both academic and professional representation an important and effective aspect of the validation and periodic review process. External examiner reports confirm that academic standards are appropriate and engagement with specific PSRB requirements likewise demonstrates the University effectively ensuring the maintenance of professional standards. Degree outcomes have improved since 2014-15 bringing the University more in line with the sector benchmark, although there remained an attainment gap of 11% in 2016-17 between those students in receipt of DSA and the remainder of the student population. As a result, the adoption of more accessible and inclusive assessment practices was a key element of the University's enhancement theme of Assessment and Feedback during 2017-18. The SSSLA appropriately focuses on enabling an equal experience where all students can fulfil their potential. The Student and Campus Life Team also provides a wide range of services to support the learning experience of all students including one-to-one study skills support.

94 The review team concludes that management of academic standards, set and maintained by the University for student attainment, is robust.

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

95 Sections 4.1 and 4.5 summarise the methods that the University uses to monitor and review the quality of its provision and provides examples of the effective use of data at a strategic and operational level. Key performance indicators presented to the Board of Governors are appropriately aligned to a respective supporting strategy and a monitoring committee. Measurable targets inform the University's self-evaluation and drive enhancement. This applies equally to detailed strategy action plans with clear reporting frameworks as it does, for example, to Annual Monitoring Reports. Staff confirmed to the review team that they use data, including AMR data, to strengthen the relevance and currency of their programmes and assignment briefs. NSS action plans from professional services and the academic faculties also illustrate detailed data informed target setting.

96 Data is also used in a constructive manner to inform discussions about changes to the Regulatory Framework, and policies and processes for the benefit of the student body, such as in relation to the complaints procedures or changing the Repeat Year decision threshold from 60 credits to 80 credits. Students have opportunities to inform decision-making at every level and they confirmed to the review team that changes are made in response to their feedback.

97 The review team concludes that the University is making good use of both quantitative and qualitative data to aid self-evaluation and inform decision-making. It recognises their planned increased engagement with the Jisc Analytics project and discovery tool as a positive way to further strengthen the role of data analysis for the benefit of the student cohort.

## 5 Collaborative provision

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

98 The University has developed a new Vision in which it views itself as being a significant player within North Wales and across the border into the north west of England. In support of this ambition, the Vice-Chancellor is a member of the Board of the North Wales Growth Deal where the University has a significant role in the regeneration of the region.

99 To support businesses locally and promote student employability, academics have collaborated effectively with local employers on a variety of initiatives across a range of subject areas. This activity is congruent with the University's Civic Engagement Strategy. Students participating in these initiatives have benefited from the learning they accrued which has for some, led to several significant outcomes, such as the setting up of their own businesses.

100 The University has invested strategically and significantly in developing collaborative partnerships. It has expanded its committee structure through the introduction of partner-specific committees and by increasing the human resource dedicated to the oversight of partnerships, which both serve to individually and collectively mitigate risk robustly.

101 In addition to the Partnerships Office, the University maintains oversight of its collaborative provision through its committee structure. An Academic Partnership Committee has been introduced to support Academic Board and bring focus to its collaborative activity. This Committee is a sub-committee of Academic Board and receives reports from the main operational partnerships group namely, the Academic Link Operational Group. The network of Academic Links is the primary mechanism for communication between the University and partner higher education providers. This communication invariably relates to specific course operation issues but also includes notices of regulatory changes being made to, and at, the University. From the perspective of partner institutions, this mechanism is effective and regarded positively.

102 The partner providers are represented on the Academic Partnership Committee by University Academic Links. The Academic Link Operational Group meeting covers the functional management of all of the University's partnerships and is an arena in which good practice is shared and disseminated. Recurring themes and issues raised at this meeting are reported up to the Academic Partnership Committee.

103 The University's recent enhancement initiatives, such as ADT, have not as yet extended to partner providers. The University told the review team that this needs to happen and will be addressed in future planning.

104 Students studying at partner providers can use some of the feedback mechanisms as those studying on campus namely Tell Glyn, module evaluations and the Student Voice Forum. Services to students are, in principle, provided by the partner. Following an audit of a partner's provision the University can make resources available.

105 Partner providers participate in University Annual Monitoring Procedures. The Partnerships Office reviews the performance of each provider and course-level monitoring across all providers is conducted by faculties. Annual Monitoring Reports are considered at the LTQC. This seems to be a well understood system.

106 External examiners sample the work of students studying at partner providers and they scrutinise the programme assessment at all points of delivery. This seems to be effective. While the University sets assessments, partner providers conduct both first and second marking, samples of which are subsequently moderated by University academics in terms of parity and consistency. Partners are well aware of existing systems and procedures and familiar with their role within them.

107 Applications to study at partner institutions are submitted to, and scrutinised by, the University. The University retains responsibility for admitting and enrolling all students including those at partner providers.

108 The University Regulations, Policies and Procedures and the Academic Quality Handbook encompass collaborative provision. Additionally, a Collaborative Provision Handbook has been produced to clarify roles and procedures.

109 Proposals for new partnerships are reviewed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Partnerships). The Academic Partnerships Committee also reviews the initial proposal. Subsequently, due diligence reports for new partners require the approval of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Team to proceed to Academic Board through Academic Partnerships Committee. Due diligence considers information about the status of the proposed partner and programmes, the strategic rationale, staffing, resource implications and a business case. A risk assessment must also be completed before a collaborative partner proposal is approved. The risk assessment covers: the financial and legal status of the partner; their socio-political context; their resourcing and prior experience of delivering higher education; if there are any external quality assurance reports; and the experience of both the University's and proposed partner's faculty to manage the programme.

110 The University is the delivery partner for research degrees for two different awarding bodies since currently it does not have Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAPs). While working towards securing RDAPs, the University does not have a definitive date by which it intends to secure these. Currently, the University's research students are registered with either the University of Chester or the University of Wales, with the latter partnership coming to a planned close.

111 The University has recently commissioned an external review of the PGR provision. PGR students demonstrated that some of the recommendations emerging from the review are being addressed, for example, access to funding. PGR student feedback is monitored through the awarding bodies' procedures for this purpose. This monitoring is reported to Wrexham Glyndŵr University's Research Degrees Sub-committee. PGR students have a rich schedule of training events in place. The analysis of the results of the PGR student survey is overdue and is discussed further at paragraph 45.

112 The University has a centralised unit for overseeing, coordinating and securing work-based placements. The Work-Related Learning Unit facilitates placements for professional courses where placements are mandatory and for students on courses where no such requirement exists. This moves the onus away from students to find their own placements, which is appropriate and creditable. A helpful handbook has been developed to direct this activity.

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

113 Locally, the University works with five UK further education colleges to offer higher education. These partnerships, while at different stages of maturity, appear unproblematic. There are no specific plans to expand this network further.

114 From an international perspective, the University has developed an International Strategy in which it aims to grow significantly its transnational education (TNE), predominantly in Asia. The University is, and has, planned the resourcing of this expansion. Much of the growth in partnerships overseas is comprised of private colleges to which the University franchises a broad spectrum of programmes from sub-degree to Master's Level. Wrexham Glyndŵr University has appointed a Pro Vice-Chancellor who has a specific institutional remit for partnerships and a legal adviser has been engaged to review collaborative activity including new proposals. A Partnership Office has been established to effectively oversee and coordinate the work of the University in this sphere of its operation. Growth in TNE in Europe and Asia has been articulated in a briefing presented to the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Board, which indicates that growth is kept under review and identifies a need for more flexible processes.

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

115 In conclusion, the University currently has a robust and effective framework to manage each aspect of their collaborative provision. In reaching this view, the team acknowledges the University has conducted what constitutes a major overhaul of their previous arrangements for managing partnerships. This has included considerable investment in personnel and a remodelling of the University's committee structure. Before being signed off by the University Executive, new proposals are vetted using a due diligence procedure, which considers all aspects of a partner's operation. This is considered at bespoke, strategic committees within the structure, namely Academic Partnership Committee and Academic Board. The strategic direction of travel for TNE has already been established in a briefing to the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Board. Emergent operational issues are initially picked up at the Academic Link Operational Group, through Link Officers and escalated to the Academic Partnership Committee for action. The Collaborative Handbook is a comprehensive resource which includes reference to all the University Regulations that delivery within the partners are similarly subject to. All academic collaborative activity is overseen by the Partnership Office. This network of committees, Offices and responsible individuals is well understood within the University and amongst its partners. Enhancement activity in the form of ADT is yet to be embedded in the University's partners, although this is recognised and is being planned.

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