

Quality Enhancement Review

Swansea University

Outcome Report

December 2020



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About the Quality Enhancement Review method

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

About this review

This is the Outcome Report of the QER conducted by QAA at Swansea University. The Review Visit was originally scheduled to take place during March 2020. This was after the national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the Review Visit being postponed. In discussion with the University and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, the review visit was rescheduled and took place on 9-13 November 2020. QAA made some amendments to the QER process to accommodate the ongoing pandemic, most notable of which was that the review visit was conducted entirely online.

The review was conducted by a team of four reviewers:

- Dr Nicola Jackson
- Mr David Lloyd
- Professor Jethro Newton
- Ms Nina Di Cara (student reviewer).

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

In this report, and based on the information presented, the QER team makes judgements on:

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

It is possible for the overarching judgement to be expressed in three levels which indicate whether the provider 'meets these requirements', 'meets them with conditions', or 'does not meet requirements'. More detail on these categories is provided in the QER Handbook.

The overarching judgement for this report can be found on page 3, followed by any commendations, affirmations and recommendations.

A more detailed [Technical Report](#) is also available for this review.³ The Technical Report sets out the team's findings under each heading in the QER method.

¹ About QER: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/quality-enhancement-review.

² About QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us

³ Technical Report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/Swansea-University

About Swansea University

Swansea University is in its centenary year, having been established by Royal Charter in 1920 as a constituent institution of the University of Wales. The title of Swansea University was formally adopted in 2007.

The University's vision states that 'Together, we will transform lives and futures by providing an outstanding academic environment with a balance of excellence between world-class teaching and research, driving impact that is enabled by effective regional and global collaborations.'

This vision is accompanied by the University's mission which is stated as follows to:

- 'Deliver an outstanding student experience, with research-led and practice-driven teaching of the highest quality that produces global graduates educated and equipped for distinguished personal and professional achievement.
- Provide an environment of research excellence, with research that is world-leading, globally collaborative, and internationally recognised.
- Use our teaching and research strengths, collaboration with industry, and global reach to drive economic growth, foster prosperity, enrich the community and cultural life of Wales, as well as contribute to the health, leisure and wellbeing of its citizens.'

The University's Strategic Plan, launched in 2004, is in its fourth phase, and is due to end in 2020. The development of the new Strategic Plan is underway with widespread consultation with the university community being undertaken.

The University currently has in excess of 20,000 full and part-time students, approximately 53% of whom are male and 47% female. Black and minority ethnic (BAME) student numbers are increasing, with a 62% rise in BAME first-year students between 2013 and 2017. The University's academic departments are currently organised into seven colleges and the University employs 3,500 academic and professional services staff.

Since the last QAA review in 2014, the University has made some key changes, including the significant development of the Bay Campus, which opened in 2015, and upgrades to the Singleton Campus. It has introduced the STEP4Excellence (S4X) framework which drives the delivery of student experience enhancement themes related to academic and pastoral support, student engagement, learning and teaching, and culture change. It has established a dedicated Student Partnership and Engagement Services Team, and the development of the MyUniHub, in order to further enhance the provision of student-facing services. The responsibilities of the University's Senior Management Team have been revised and plans are being made for further revisions. In addition, a review of the academic infrastructure took place, leading to refinements to the way in which quality assurance is approached; along with enhancements to the governance structure. September 2017 saw the launch of The College, Swansea University, created to strengthen pathway provision into the University's taught programmes.

The University was awarded a Gold rating for Teaching Excellence in 2018; it was ranked 30th out of 120 institutions in *The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide*; and the results from the 2014 Research Excellence Framework showed the University's position as moving from 52nd in 2008 to 26th in 2014. In addition, the University holds an Athena SWAN Silver Award.

Currently, the University's collaborative provision is relatively small-scale and comprises relationships with both international partners who provide intercalated year and study abroad opportunities, and UK partnerships which comprise validated or franchise arrangements, foundation degrees and degree apprenticeships. The University has ambitions to build on its provision and intends to take forward a new Internationalisation Strategy which will drive future collaborative activity.

In the previous QAA review in 2014, there were eight areas of good practice highlighted, two recommendations and two affirmations. An action plan was drawn up in response to these and all actions were completed by 2015. Good practice was highlighted in relation to: the contribution of the Academic Career Pathway in enhancing the students' learning experience; the role of the Swansea Academy of Learning and Teaching in enhancing learning and teaching, including the approach to staff development; the support provided to students by subject-specialist library staff, along with their role in liaising with the colleges; the use of a wide range of student feedback; the coordinated approach to developing employability; contributions by the Swansea Employability Academy, the Swansea Academy of Inclusivity and Learner Support, the Swansea Academy of Learning and Teaching and the Academi Hywel Teifi, to projects designed to enhance students' wider learning experiences; and the range of mobility and internationalisation initiatives contributing to students' personal and career development.

The recommendations asked the University to articulate the models of moderation in operation at module and programme level; and to implement a system to enable the oversight of student achievement on postgraduate research programmes.

The affirmations identified the actions being taken to ensure learning outcomes are expressed in a manner consistent with the expectations of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications*; and to monitor and improve the accuracy and completeness of definitive programme information. These actions have been taken further forward effectively.

The University asked the review to consider four areas of focus: student engagement and partnership; employability; portfolio management; student mobility and internationalisation. These were selected to reflect the strength of the University's provision.

Judgements about Swansea University

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

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

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

Commendations

The QER has identified several commendations, which are summarised below.

- The strategic focus on communication and dialogue with students that builds a strong sense of community and drives the institutional enhancement of the student experience.

- The strong focus on student partnership at the University that is embedded at all levels of the institution, and enables students to critically engage with the University's decision making.
- The agility and responsiveness of the actions taken by the University in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain continuity in learning and teaching and the student experience.
- The University's proactive use of well-developed processes and procedures for the effective strategic management and operational development and review of its academic portfolio to ensure continued relevance of its programmes.
- The actions taken by the University in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the continued robustness of quality assurance processes and regulatory matters, including the introduction of the Safety Net policy, and the application of emergency learning, teaching, and assessment regulations and policies.

Affirmations

The QER has identified several affirmations, which are summarised below.

- The steps being taken to review the institutional peer observation policy to ensure its full implementation and the systematic capture and dissemination of good practice and areas for development.
- The measures being taken to address deficiencies that the University has identified in the accessibility and use of data for decision-making, evaluation and review purposes.
- The steps being taken by the University to enhance policy and practice in academic assessment and feedback in response to issues it has identified in student responses to internal and external survey data.

Recommendations

The QER makes no recommendations.

Further information

A more detailed [Technical Report](#) is also available for this review. The Technical Report sets out the team's findings under each heading in the QER method.

This review and its findings relate to the provider as a whole and do not supply information about individual programmes of study or subjects. For further information about those, contact the provider or [visit its website](#).

Further information about QAA and QER can be found on the [QAA website](#).

QAA2570 - R10478 - Feb 21

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786
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