

# Quality Enhancement Review

Swansea University

Technical 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.<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 Swansea University. The review took place as follows: First Team Visit on 25 February 2020 and Review Visit on 9-13 November 2020. 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).

In advance of the review visits, the provider submitted a self-evaluative document (the Self-evaluative Analysis), a change report, and a Prior Information Pack, 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 relevant 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 provide 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/Swansea-University](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/Swansea-University)

## Overarching judgement about Swansea University

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

Swansea University **meets** the relevant baseline 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.

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

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

1 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.

2 The University's academic departments are currently organised into seven colleges: College of Arts and Humanities, College of Business and Economics (known as School of Management), College of Engineering, College of Human and Health Sciences, College of Law and Criminology (known as Hillary Rodham Clinton School of Law), College of Medicine (known as Swansea University Medical School), and College of Science.

3 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.'

4 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.

5 Swansea University's mission 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.'

6 The University's Strategic Plan, launched in 2004, is in its fourth phase, and is due to end in 2020. It was developed based upon engagement with staff and students. As part of its strategic planning, the University developed Swansea University 20 Centenary

Commitments identified within the following three strategic themes:

- Student experience - to deliver an inspirational student experience
- Research - to deliver world-class research
- Innovation and engagement - world-class teaching and research, driving economic growth and societal impact.

These have been identified as Strategic Enablers - critical success factors to drive the delivery of the University Strategy.

7 The University's Council is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the University and its oversight; and the University's Management Board, supported by a range of committees and working groups, is responsible for policy implementation. The University's Senate, with operational responsibilities delegated to the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, and its sub-committees, is responsible for the award of degrees and other academic qualifications.

8 The development of the new Strategic Plan is underway with widespread consultation with the university community being undertaken. Plans are being explored for the consolidation of the existing colleges into a new faculty-based structure, with accompanying Faculty Leadership Teams. This strategy will include the ongoing development of a new Internationalisation Strategy, the implementation of a revised Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the introduction of the Student Engagement Strategy.

9 On 23 March 2020, the University was required to close in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. This required the University to act quickly in order to adapt regulations and policies to ensure:

- the provision of online teaching and learning
- support for existing and future students, now located at a distance
- and, to complete assessment procedures for final-year and continuing students.

10 This significant work was initially directed by the University's Incident Management Team, led by the Vice-Chancellor. Subsequently, the work was undertaken by the COVID-19 Recovery Planning Project group, led by the Registrar/Chief Operating Officer, as the work transitioned to looking ahead to the reopening of the campus, while maintaining the safety and wellbeing of staff and students.

11 The existing principles of student partnership have been built upon in order to communicate with and to engage the student body; the Students' Union is involved in, and supportive of, the decisions and actions that have been undertaken. The governing body has been fully involved in overseeing and formally approving the changes made to regulations and policies.

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

12 The University currently has in excess of 20,000 full and part-time students. Between 2013-14 and 2017-18, undergraduate student numbers grew from 10,660 to 15,270, as part of the University's strategic plan to increase student numbers. This expansion was accompanied by investment in infrastructure, in particular, in the development of the Bay Campus, which was opened in 2015, to join the existing Singleton Campus where upgrades to existing buildings have also taken place.

13 The University's student numbers are made up of approximately 53% male and 47% female students. Black and minority ethnic (BAME) student numbers are increasing, with a 62% rise in BAME first-year students between 2013 and 2017.

14 The current strategy regarding student numbers is to target new programmes in the areas of Pharmacy, Philosophy, Sports and Social Sciences, along with a desire to attract further international students.

15 The University employs approximately 3,500 academic and professional services staff.

16 Retention rates have remained consistent, at approximately 95%, over the past three years. The award of good degrees has risen from 78% in 2017-18 to 79.4% in 2018-19. The University identifies enhanced teaching quality, academic and welfare support as factors which have contributed to a significant decrease in the gap in degree attainment between students from widening access areas and all students. The figure now stands at 1.2%, compared with 11% in 2013-14.

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

17 The University's Fee and Access Plans, submitted to HEFCW, set out the University's approach to the provision of an inclusive study environment, supporting underrepresented groups and all students to participate in, and to achieve success in, higher education. The University is currently investing in a range of priorities which include: the institution's Outreach Unit, the Reaching Wider Partnership, the provision of financial support in the form of bursaries, a focus upon mental health and wellbeing, the implementation of a civic mission strategy and the research and innovation strategy.

18 The University has increased the number of Welsh-medium students studying at the University, as part of its commitment to the promotion and advancement of the Welsh language. There are currently 452 students studying part of their programme in Welsh.

19 The University recognises its role in supporting the needs of employers through, for example, the introduction of a PGCE Secondary Education with Qualified Teacher Status, delivered by the Swansea University Schools' Partnership and the delivery of degree apprenticeships.

20 Currently, a Health and Wellbeing Strategy is being developed in order to drive forward the national policy as advocated through *The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act*.

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

21 The preparations for the review were shaped by a QER 2020 Project Management Plan, with key roles for the Institutional Facilitator and the Lead Student Representative, operating within a QER Project Management Team. The project plan involved the whole university community, including the Students' Union and student body.

22 The development of the Self-Evaluative Analysis was undertaken as a joint endeavour with the University and the Students' Union working in partnership, and the document was written with contributions from a wide range of people, including students, academic staff and professional services staff. In addition, 10 Task and Finish Groups were set up in order to map university policies, Code of Practice, Regulations and Procedures to the themes of the revised Quality Code for Higher Education.

23 A QER 2020 Governance structure was set up to ensure regular reports on progress were available, and transparency of decision making was visible, to all members of the university community. The University's Senate and Council undertook the final approval of the Self-Evaluative Analysis and Change Report in December 2019.

24 On 23 March 2020, the University was required to close as part of the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The review was therefore postponed until the autumn term and carried out online. The University prepared an update report and accompanying evidence base in order to support the review team in understanding the actions that the University had been taking during the intervening period of time. This allowed the review team to explore aspects of this during the review meetings. While this was a key part of the context of the review, the QER review team considered the University's approach to both assurance and enhancement from the time of its previous review in 2014.

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

25 Four areas of focus were identified by the University for the review to explore: student engagement and partnership; employability; portfolio management; and student mobility and internationalisation. The four areas were identified as areas of strength for the University and are discussed in subsequent sections of this report.

26 The last QAA review identified partnerships with students as a feature of good practice, and, likewise the TEF Gold Statement of Findings recognised the strength of student partnerships. The University and Students' Union regard enhancements which continue to be made in this area as evidence of a significant commitment to ever deepening partnerships and engagement.

27 The University recognises that the range of employability initiatives has resulted in rises in levels of graduate employability and has contributed to the University's top five league table position for graduate prospects (Guardian University League Table, 2020). In addition, employability was recognised as good practice in the last QAA review and in the TEF Gold Statement of Findings.

28 The University aims to ensure that sustainable programmes of the highest quality are approved. Its approach to this comprises a two-stage process of programme planning, rooted in student and employer demand, along with a similar approach to rationalisation of its portfolio of programmes.

29 Finally, the University has the ambition to increase opportunities for all students to benefit from studying or working abroad. This focus supports the drive for graduate employability.

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

30 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 of Learning and Teaching, 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.

31 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.

32 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.

33 An action plan was drawn up in response to the 2014 QAA Institutional Review. The actions identified in response to the two recommendations and two affirmations were all completed by 2015.

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

34 Currently, the University's collaborative provision is relatively small-scale and comprises relationships with both international partners who provide intercalated 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 build future collaborative activity.



## 2 Enhancing the student learning experience

### 2.1 Strategic approach to enhancing the student experience

35 The University's main strategic plan presents the student experience as one of its three key themes, which encompasses six Centenary Commitments aimed at enhancing the student experience. These commitments are operationalised through the Learning and Teaching Strategy (2019-24), and the ongoing Student Engagement Strategy, which was co-developed with the Students' Union (SU) and launched in 2019. The University's strategic focus on the student experience is also reflected in their decision to include Student Engagement and Partnership as an area of focus in the present review. The main strategic plan is due to end in 2020 and this has provided an opportunity to review the University's approach going forward which has involved consulting with over 500 students and alumni to develop future priorities.

36 The main body with responsibility for strategic matters relating to the enhancement of the student experience, and learning, teaching and assessment is the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (LTQC). LTQC has five student members. In addition, the Student Partnership and Engagement Committee (SPEC) is a sub-committee of the Council that aims to enhance the student experience through a partnership with the Students' Union. This committee oversees the Student Engagement Strategy and comprises the full-time Sabbatical Officers, two members of the University Council, college-level Student Engagement Leads and key professional services staff.

37 The University's strategic approach to the student experience has led to multiple structural developments that enable a more coordinated approach to the student experience. This includes the appointment of Deans in areas such as postgraduate research and assessment and feedback, the introduction of college-level Student Engagement Leads, the development of a dedicated Student Partnership and Engagement Service (SPES) and the introduction of the MyUniHub single point of access to increase the accessibility of non-academic services to students. It has also included investments in technologies that facilitate the University's communication with their students, such as EvaMetrics for module feedback, and the Unitu student feedback platform.

38 The review team heard, throughout meetings with both staff and students, about the importance of the partnership between the University and the student body, and saw the embeddedness of the strategic focus on partnership working in the University's interactions with its students. Therefore, the review team **commends** 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.

### 2.2 Approach to working in partnership with students

39 The University's strategic priorities, as articulated through the Centenary Commitments, the University Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the Student Engagement Strategy, place a key emphasis on 'respecting and valuing students as partners'. To do this, the University makes effective use of its partnership with the SU to ensure that student partnerships are core to decision-making at all levels of the University. For this Quality Enhancement Review, the University and the SU (on behalf of the student body) chose to submit a joint Self-Evaluative Analysis.

40 The University, in partnership with the SU has a student representative system, known as the 'Education Zone', which comprises 29 college representatives and approximately 350 course-level representatives, including postgraduate research - who are supported by the SU, the Student Partnership and Engagement Service, and college-level

Student Engagement Leads. Student representatives are a key part of the University's deliberative committee structure, working with Student Engagement Leads to run student-staff meetings, and contributing to the development of school-level student experience action plans. Additionally, the University has created a role for Student Reviewers, whereby students engage jointly with University staff as partners in a range of quality activities. This scheme has had a positive reception from both students and staff who met with the review team.

41 To reach the wider student community, the University annually runs a Big Swansea Survey Campaign under which it advertises the National Student Survey (NSS) and its internal student experience surveys (SES). The outcomes of annual student experience surveys feed into the aforementioned action plans, leading to 'Together We Changed' messages which are disseminated to students. Module evaluation is also undertaken throughout the year at the mid and end stages of modules through a new online system.

42 The University also collects feedback throughout the year with student opinion panel events and through the Unitu platform. This is an online application where all students can submit feedback; it is moderated by student representatives and feedback is publicly allocated to individuals who then post updates on actions taken. Unitu has increased the transparency, accountability and timeliness with which the University responds to student concerns, with its effectiveness demonstrated in the University's ability to quickly respond to student concerns at the start of the coronavirus pandemic (see Sections 3.2 and 4.7).

43 Students and staff described a partnership with the University that allows students to critically engage with a wide variety of decisions being made - from joint development of action plans, to inclusion in staff interview panels - supported by the student representative system, and the various routes available to provide feedback. As such, the review team **commends** 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.

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

44 Swansea University makes a direct commitment to addressing the needs of its diverse student population and increasing its diversity further in its Centenary Commitments and in its Learning and Teaching Strategy where it draws focus to 'enabling individuals from underrepresented groups to enter higher education'. Specifically focused on diversity, the University has a Strategic Equality Plan 2016-20 which is monitored by the University Equality Committee. The plan includes targets to reduce the attainment gap for black and minority ethnic students to 3%, which is in progress, and has fulfilled its aims to achieve a Silver Athena SWAN award and recognition from Stonewall. This work is taking place in partnership with the SU. The University's Fee and Access Plan 2019-20 also provides evidence of credible and robust plans to increase access, participation, retention and outcomes for students from a diverse range of groups.

45 The University's approach to recognising and responding to the diversity of the student population is largely overseen by the Swansea Academy of Inclusivity and Learner Success (SAILS). SAILS is a cross-university academy that reports to the LTQC and coordinates a range of activities aimed at improving retention, access, progression and outcomes for disadvantaged students internally, as well as outreach work with local schools and further education colleges. Programmes such as Step Up to Swansea have increased access to university for local Year 12 students from disadvantaged areas, and Wales-wide care leavers. Other initiatives include a 'toolkit' to better support personal tutors, and peer-

to-peer student mentoring. Swansea University is also the lead partner of the South West Wales Reaching Wider Programme (SWWRWP), which is a partnership between Swansea, the University of Wales Trinity St David, and local further education colleges, aimed at increasing access to education for students from disadvantaged areas.

46 Students are provided with information before joining the University, and during enrolment, to ensure they have a smooth transition to university life. Once enrolled, students can access support through their Academic Mentor (personal tutor), who can refer students on to appropriate support services within the University as required, such as the college Academic Disability Coordinator or Inclusive Student Support Services. All students also have access to MyUniHub, which is a single point of access for all non-academic services including student support and professional services. Initial feedback from students suggests it has had a positive impact on students' ability to navigate available resources.

47 Specifically, support available includes free online cognitive behavioural therapy, one-to-one counselling, and other group-based or self-help resources through the Wellbeing Service, and specific disability support through the Disability Office. The University runs classes that provide independent living skills, and a specific support package for care leavers, among other schemes, through their Campus Life initiative. Students can also receive bespoke work placements through a GO Wales scheme, which supports students from underrepresented groups. Evidence provided from the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) metrics shows that those from underrepresented groups achieved above sector averages in highly-skilled employment and further study.

48 Students with whom the review team met found the support available to them to be accessible and useful. Students from underrepresented groups also noted the welcoming and friendly nature of the University community which had made their transition to university life easier. Staff described outreach initiatives at department level specifically intended to reach diverse groups, and physical adaptations to specialist equipment, such as laboratory benches. Overall, the review team saw that the University has a range of initiatives to support students from diverse backgrounds, and robust plans to address areas of known inequality.

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

49 In general, the University considers its taught provision together, encompassing both undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate taught (PGT) students under a unified strategic approach, with systems and structures that address the taught student experience. This being said, the review team saw that PGT and UG student experiences are not conflated. There is a targeted student experience survey for PGT students; and there are PGT student representatives, targeted PGT communications, and student experience data stratified by UG and PGT to take account of the difference in experience between both groups.

50 The postgraduate research (PGR) student experience at Swansea is overseen by the PGR Office, which sits within the Academic Services Directorate and was established in 2016. Strategic aims for postgraduate research are covered in the Research and Innovation Strategy (2017-20) which expresses the intention to strengthen the University's research portfolio by providing an excellent student experience and research environment for PGR students and has been in place alongside a 73% increase in PGR students between 2013-14 and 2018-19. In 2019-20, a Doctoral Training Strategy and Governance Oversight Group was also established to oversee cohort-based doctoral programmes.

51 The Dean of PGR is the strategic academic lead for the University's approach to the PGR student experience. The PGR Committee, led by the Dean of PGR and with membership from college-level PGR directors and college PGR student representatives, sits

as a sub-committee of both the Research and Innovation Committee and the LTQC, recognising the joint membership of PGR students to research and student communities.

52 The PGR student voice is captured through PGR student representatives, a PGR student discussion forum that meets several times throughout the year and through an annual PGR SES. Students met by the review team were aware of their opportunities to provide feedback and were familiar with their student representatives.

53 In recent years, the University has implemented a programme of transformation around its PGR provision. This has included establishment of the PGR Office in 2016, appointment of the Dean of PGR, new scholarships being offered, a review of supervision and a programme of work entitled PGR Matters - designed to target improvements in specific aspects of the PGR experience. The review team also saw improved systems had been implemented for monitoring and reviewing PGR data through the PGR dashboard (see Section 4.5). The University also conducted a review of PGR health and wellbeing in 2018-19 and has implemented recommendations such as to improve information about PGR contacts with wellbeing services. Students the review team met with recognised a significant improvement in the cohesiveness and approach to the PGR experience over the past several years as a result, and said that they particularly benefitted from the introduction of the online Research Management System (RMS), which ensures that expectations of supervision frequency and progress monitoring processes are clear to all parties.

54 Development opportunities for PGRs are delivered through the Postgraduate Training Framework, which was refreshed in 2017 with a strand for both students and supervisors that includes compulsory training for new supervisors. Evidence provided shows that there has been increased take up of training since 2017, and students can record the training they have attended on their RMS profile.

55 Students that the review team met were positive about the training and support available in general, including the support for students who deliver teaching to apply for HEA Associate Fellowship. During the visit, the review team heard differing feedback about expectations of teaching across colleges. The team noted that the University's policy on student teaching time is not applicable to unpaid students and that, as a result, time spent teaching is not moderated for these students in the same way as for employed students.

## **2.5 Supporting students in their development as learners**

56 The review team has concluded that the University aims to provide a supportive and inclusive environment, and has implemented a range of integrated initiatives designed to support students in their development as learners and to enable them to achieve the highest personal, academic and employment outcomes.

57 The University has moved from a personal tutor system to an approach based on academic mentoring, coupled with enhanced student wellbeing and study skills support. Evidence from the students' contribution to the Swansea Employability Academy (SEA), along with comments from some of the students met by the review team, were positive regarding the academic mentoring approach.

58 The Centre for Academic Success (CAS) provides a full programme of academic assistance courses to students at all levels but with a focus on undergraduate students. Academic Success tutors at CAS work closely with academic subject specialists to embed specific skills into the curriculum at subject level. Provision includes mathematics and statistics development, writing skills and specialised tuition to support students with particular learning needs.

59 The review team noted that CAS activities are integrated with the University's wider strategic approach, for example, through tutors from CAS working with the University's Reaching Wider Team to support widening access student transition on the Step Up to Swansea programme and through piloting the use of peer learning, using Level 5/6 students to facilitate study groups for Level 4 students to support them with understanding subject content and developing their academic and independent study skills.

60 The University's English Language Training Services (ELTS) provides a variety of in-sessional, pre-sessional and summer courses focused on English language academic skills and on enabling pre-entry students to gain the necessary English language entry requirements. ELTS staff also work with academic subject staff to embed provision within relevant programmes in subject areas, such as business and engineering, where there are high numbers of international students.

61 The University's library staff work closely with academic subject lecturers to provide support for information literacy skills and the University has developed its Digital Transformation Strategy to produce an Information and Digital Literacy Framework to assist lecturers to adopt a phased approach to embedding these skills in their programmes. Development and delivery of library services is guided by the Library Strategies, Libraries Service Planning and relevant Student Experience Action Plans.

62 The University presented employability as one of its areas of focus for this review, reflecting the emphasis placed by the University on this area since 2012. This emphasis has resulted in the University becoming one of the top-ranked institutions in the UK for graduate employability and was a significant contributor to the University's TEF Gold Award in 2018.

63 Strategic oversight and development of this area is led by the Swansea Employability Academy (SEA), working to deliver the SEA Strategy. The SEA Strategy Board involves 35 external partners, including major regional employers and multinational companies. Employability structures are embedded at college and subject levels, with directors of employability and student representatives in each college, responsible for driving employability initiatives in their area. Employability is a standing item for discussion at the University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee and at college committees and forums. A Partnership Agreement has been signed between the Students' Union and SEA and the Students' Union actively supports and promotes the activities of SEA, including hosting 'Week of Work' (WOW) placements and internships through the Swansea Paid Internship Network (SPIN).

64 The review team heard about the work undertaken by the University in partnership with employers, which encompasses a wide range of opportunities both at institutional level and embedded within degree programmes. Academic developments are informed by inputs from employers. From its discussions with both students and employers, the team was able to confirm the positive picture presented by the University of this area.

65 The University also presented student mobility as an area of focus for this review, and its commitment to this area is reaffirmed in its developing internationalisation strategy. Most of the student mobility arrangements are governed by exchange agreements, including those conducted under Erasmus+ arrangements. The University offers the Think Pacific Summer Programme opportunity and the Go Global and college-led summer programmes, resulting in 100% student satisfaction rates for the latter two programmes.

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

66 The University has taken steps in recent years to enhance the physical learning environment, both through the infrastructure investment in the new Bay Campus and in the refurbishment of the estate at the Singleton Campus. Developments have included provision

of open learning spaces such as 'Y Twyni' on the Bay Campus, which have been welcomed by students. The coordination of the learning environment is led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education and supported by the Learning Spaces Working Group, which includes representation from all colleges, Swansea Academy of Learning and Teaching leads, and professional services.

67 The University has a number of ongoing initiatives relating to the learning environment, including the library-led initiative to improve the accessibility of library learning spaces and the quality of the facilities provided in those spaces. The Digital Transformation Strategy includes a theme relating to the Student Digital Experience and is informed by feedback from students and staff, highlighting the importance of staff support and training, and with an aspiration of ensuring staff and student consultation and communication.

68 The digital learning platform project has been the main vehicle for introducing a new virtual learning environment (VLE), consistent with the aspirations of the Digital Transformation Strategy. A consultation, tendering and selection process was undertaken with extensive input and involvement from students and staff at all stages of the process. This led to the University's decision to move from Blackboard to the new Canvas VLE for 2020-21.

69 The outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020 meant that there was particular urgency and importance attached to the move to the new Canvas VLE, since this would now become the main platform for the delivery of a vastly expanded offering of online teaching and accompanying learning resources. This was successfully achieved over the summer of 2020 and the feedback on this from the students and staff who met the team has been generally very positive, including actions taken to deal with teething problems, where these arose.

70 A key part of the success of this transition has been the monitoring and evaluation of the ongoing student feedback received during the migration process. The work of staff teams in the Swansea Academy of Learning and Teaching (SALT), CAS, and the Library and Information Services and Systems (ISS) has also been crucial to the successful move to online delivery, along with the contributions made by academic staff at discipline and programme levels. It has also been timely in this respect that the University has recently appointed a Dean of Education Technology who has provided a focal point for the changes to be made.

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

71 The University's aim to support the Welsh medium student learning experience is driven internally by Academi Hywel Teifi (AHT), which works in partnership at a sector level with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (CCC) to identify subject areas for the strategic and sustainable development of Welsh medium provision. Each college has a Welsh Language Committee which informs the work led by AHT at institutional level and there are designated AHT Champions to promote the work of AHT within each of the colleges.

72 The University's focus has been on developing sustainable levels of provision in targeted subject areas, allowing most students to be eligible for either incentive scholarships (40+ credits of provision) or main scholarships (80+ credits of provision) from the CCC. This approach has led to a 40% increase since 2011 in numbers studying through the medium of Welsh, with 452 undergraduate students currently studying some element of their course through the medium of Welsh. Sustainability of provision has been underpinned through new appointments in strategic areas made under the CCC Staffing Scheme.

73 A particular area of development has been in social work where, from a situation of no provision in 2013, there are now 157 students studying credits through the medium of

Welsh, with 21 of these studying 40+ credits. The University has developed Welsh language learning and teaching resources in this area, including the successful launch of an app (Ap Gofalu trwy'r Gymraeg) to support healthcare workers with their Welsh language skills.

74 The University has demonstrated its attention to ensuring the standards of its Welsh medium provision, through the roll-out of a new Welsh language assessment policy which provides guidance for students and staff on the moderation and marking of assignments submitted through the medium of Welsh, as well as the issuing of a comprehensive guide to ensure that, wherever possible, work is assessed in the language of its submission.

75 Welsh language students are offered regular work experience opportunities and Academi Hywel Teifi has collaborated with SEA to offer SPIN internships, to enable students to gain experience and develop new skills while working through the medium of Welsh. The success of this approach is evidenced by the University's 2017 and 2018 TEF metrics, showing employability or further study rates of 84.6% for Welsh medium students, 5% higher than that for all full-time students.

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

76 The University's approach to enhancing the student learning experience is characterised by its focus on partnership and a sense of genuine engagement between the University, the Students' Union and the wider student body. The University was commended for its approach in this area in the previous institutional review and it has continued to strategically develop and strengthen its student engagement processes over recent years.

77 The strength and effectiveness of the University's approach has been clearly demonstrated by the way in which it has been able to swiftly and efficiently adapt the delivery of its learning and teaching in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, while maintaining the sense of partnership and engagement (see commendation in Section 3.2).

78 The review team considered that previously identified areas for development, most notably in the area of oversight of student progress and achievement on PGR programmes, had been addressed effectively and were now becoming embedded within the University's procedures (see Sections 2.4 and 4.4).

79 The University has invested significantly in its physical estate, notably through the opening of the Bay Campus, and has also managed to transition swiftly and successfully to its new VLE platform (Canvas) over the summer of 2020. The transition to Canvas has been particularly important in enabling the University to move much of its provision to an online/blended learning mode of delivery for the 2020-21 academic session.

80 Key to the effectiveness of the University's approach to supporting student learning has been the integration of student feedback to inform its strategic development, policy decisions and operational delivery of enhancements to the student learning experience. The Unitu feedback system enables student views to be actively monitored and acted upon in 'real time', enabling the University to be more agile and responsive to student needs. Coupled with the strong sense of a genuine partnership between the University and its students, in which the Students' Union and SU representatives play a leading role, the team feels that the University's approach to enhancing the student learning experience is both effective and genuinely collaborative.

### 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

81 The University infrastructure supports an effective structured approach to forward planning, with the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee which aligns strategic oversight and delivery, and which reports to the Senate. LTQC oversees quality assurance and enhancement of learning, teaching and the student experience, including postgraduate research. A number of subcommittees feed into LTQC: Academic Data Quality Committee (ADQC), Academic Regulations and Cases Board, Collaborative Partnership Board, Programme Management Board, Programme Approval Committee, Progression and Awards Board and the Postgraduate Research Committee. Learning and Teaching Committees (LTCs) at college level, chaired by college Directors of Learning and Teaching (DLT), report to LTQC.

82 The University Learning and Teaching Strategy 2019-24 was developed with student input by a strategy development group comprising the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education, college directors of learning and teaching, and the Students' Union. This takes a structured approach to enhancement on an annual cycle, with the Learning and Teaching Strategy Steering Group reporting to LTQC, and a project programme for 2019-20 implemented through a University Learning and Teaching Enhancement Plan. The Learning and Teaching Strategy includes key themes and objectives aligned to identified Centenary Commitments, with a university enhancement focus for 2019-20 of assessment and feedback. Recent staff appointments, such as the Dean of Assessment and Feedback, support this work. A focus on national priorities includes the delivery of vocational subjects in the medium of Welsh, which has continued since March uninterrupted online.

83 Swansea Academy of Learning and Teaching (SALT) provides access to up-to-date pedagogy, provides teaching support and administers a staff teaching award scheme. In addition, staff attend an annual SALT conference. The Director of SALT attends LTQC. SALT supported teachers with maintaining quality of provision and continuity of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a strategic move to online and then blended teaching.

84 ADQC monitors the data landscape, using external sources and metrics, such as student satisfaction and students' qualitative feedback, continuation and graduate outcomes to develop an overview. Institutionally identified performance indicators and key performance indicators (KPIs) are developed and distributed by the Planning and Strategic Projects Unit (PSPU), informing college Student Experience Action Plans and Annual Programme Reviews (APRs). APRs include a response to teaching and learning issues.

85 Heads of college are provided with a range of university determined KPIs by the Planning and Strategic Projects Unit, such as raising the NSS score for assessment and feedback. College Integrated Action Plans track progress.

86 College LTCs, LTQC and Senate have ensured updated regulations are in place and reviewed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ongoing feedback from students is seen as central to achieving learning and teaching consistency.

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

87 The University's approach to changes in teaching and learning is illustrated by its agile and robust response to challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic; since March



2020, teaching was moved online and then to a blended model. These changes were rapid and seen as successful and sustainable by staff and students. Technology innovations have supported these moves, such as migrating the learning platform to Canvas, and introducing e:Vision to support postgraduate learning. College LTCs, LTQC and Senate have oversight of changes, with overall strategy led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education. Local practices have also been valuable, such as a combined STEM group reviewing and planning online and blended delivery. Timetabling of teaching has been flexed, with some amendments to start dates. A Safety Net Policy has ensured that no students have been disadvantaged by changes.

88 These approaches are informed by sector scanning and by Swansea University staff involved in national special interest curriculum groups. Extensive use is made of data to evaluate and inform change, with ADQC central to its capture and dissemination, overseen by LTQC. New appointments, such as the Dean of Assessment and Feedback, are in line with University strategy to invest in the enhancement agenda, with implementation supported by SALT. SALT has been key to supporting the introduction of innovative pedagogies by new and established staff. Formal methods such as peer observation, and informal ones such as the open-door policy, are used to share new forms of practice.

89 Student engagement and feedback has been central to supporting change. Colleges use student forums to inform teaching and learning plans and to review policies, such as the Safety Net, under the student engagement strategy. Data from students includes all student surveys such as NSS and SES, module feedback, and immediate feedback at the end of lectures. The College of Science, for example, sought feedback from students about different learning and teaching approaches at UG and PG level, together with a staff questionnaire, to inform teaching plans. Students feed into Boards of Study and are kept informed on future regulations and methods by the University. The review team noted the continuity of learning and teaching in challenging circumstances, and student satisfaction with these arrangements and **commends** 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.

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

90 Innovative pedagogy is developed both at college level, as in the example described to the review team of a STEM group working to develop engaging online delivery, and through sector scanning. Initiatives are captured and disseminated through SALT, working with individual staff and providing an annual staff conference on learning and teaching. The review team heard that SALT support had been important in supporting staff through the changes to migrate delivery online since March for example, and that the conference was effective and welcomed by staff. The review team also heard how staff attend national conferences such as Advance HE/Higher Education Academy and special interest groups. Feedback from these and all good practice is disseminated at college and departmental level through staff meetings, including themes such as the use of image capture. Support for new staff by SALT was described as proactive and effective. Informal sharing of good practice is supported by an open-door policy which has been recognised as good practice. As described in Section 3.4, the University has actively engaged with Advance HE/Higher Education Academy Fellowship (HEAF) for both new and more experienced staff.

91 New technologies such as Canvas, e:Vision and the PGR Dashboard have been effective in supporting learning and teaching, and are welcomed by staff and students, underpinned by a digital transformation strategy. A blended learning pilot project was undertaken across the University from 2017 to 2019.

92 The University has in place a peer observation process which is mandatory for all academic staff and which is designed to inform the PDR process. The system was reviewed and enhanced for the 2019-20 academic session. The review team heard that this is working well at local level and is part of PG Cert HE requirements; staff described the scheme as beneficial in sharing innovative methods, that it is taken seriously, and that SALT aims to capture and disseminate good practice through the annual staff conference, for example. However, the University recognises that there are inconsistencies in implementation and the review team welcomes and **affirms** 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.

### 3.4 Engaging, developing and supporting staff

93 The Learning and Teaching Strategy, implemented and led by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Education, LTQC and college Directors of Learning and Teaching, supports a culture of engagement, development and collaboration among staff. This approach is informed by an inclusive environment, an aim for excellence, and collaborative working with students. The review team heard positive comments from staff and students concerning their involvement and engagement with the institution. The inclusive environment is supported by engagement with the Athena SWAN scheme to promote gender equality in which the University holds a Silver award. The review team heard that subject areas such as nursing, engineering and physics aim to be at, or above, national benchmarks in these subject areas and this work is ongoing in terms of recruitment, representation, and monitoring. The College of Engineering has achieved a Silver award and the Physics Department and the Computational Foundry (computer science and mathematics) hold Juno and/or Bronze Athena SWAN awards. A dedicated professional services lead ensures an ongoing focus on equality and diversity, and training in this area is mandatory for all staff. The University is currently in the process of developing its Health and Wellbeing Strategy to drive forward a holistic approach to health and wellbeing.

94 Professional development is reviewed biannually for all staff using an online system, and teaching excellence is recognised through reward schemes, including student nominations. Staff promotion includes Learning and Teaching excellence up to Professorial level, with three career pathways, based on teaching and scholarship or innovation and engagement (a third pathway focuses on excellence in research).

95 All new academic staff are required to enrol on the Postgraduate Certificate Teaching in Higher Education qualification (PG Cert HE); and the review team heard that, although demanding, new staff members found this supported their skills development and was welcomed. Academic Success lecturers and SALT support development and delivery of teaching across campuses. Staff describe a culture of working together to share good practice, through the open door and peer review schemes described above, disseminated at departmental meetings.

96 The University has actively engaged with Advance HE/Higher Education Academy Fellowship (HEAF) for both new and more experienced staff. The University has an HEAF recognition target to achieve 700 Fellows by 2020. This is ongoing; over 500 staff were HEA Fellows in June 2019 across Research, Teaching and Innovation/Engagement pathways. Newly appointed staff were positive concerning their application for Associate Fellowship. The scheme has continued during the COVID-19 pandemic challenges.

97 Staff are supported to deliver the curriculum in the medium of Welsh, supported by AHT, Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, the colleges' and schools' Welsh Language Provision Committees and the colleges.

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

98 The approach to enhancement of learning and teaching is focussed and effective. This is reflected in the TEF Gold award held by the University. Undergraduate continuation rates stand at 95%, or higher, for all years, and the University continues to maintain a good level of PG progression. Students perform well above the sector benchmark in achieving graduate employment. The University achieved the WhatUni Student Choice University of the Year Award in 2019.

99 A SALT annual learning and teaching conference is welcomed by staff and the work of Swansea Academy of Inclusivity and Learner Success (SAILS) and the Centre for Academic Success (CAS) supports approaches to student inclusion. The review team heard that the move to the Canvas online platform has been welcomed, despite the challenges of its implementation, that e:Vision is welcomed by students and that the PG Dashboard allows staff and students to track progress much more effectively.

100 Students spoke positively about their recent experiences of online learning, which has clearly been part of a planned strategy, overseen by LTQC, which ensures that policy and procedures are adhered to. The new teaching models are sustainable, and no further impact on regulations is anticipated (see paragraph 86). Welsh language provision has continued uninterrupted online during the pandemic. Staff and students feel that the Safety Net Policy has worked well (see commendations in Sections 3.2 and 4.7).

## 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

101 The University's approach to the management of quality assurance operates through processes and procedures at university, college, subject and programme levels. The academic regulatory framework sets out responsibilities for the management of quality and includes supporting policies. This approach is aligned to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications*, the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales*, and PSRB accreditation requirements. This is evidenced by internal codes of practice and extensive mapping undertaken against the Quality Code (2018). The University's support for the Welsh language is in line with Welsh Language Standards (2018).

102 While formal accountability for quality and standards resides with Senate, reporting to the University Council, oversight of the management of quality is exercised by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (LTQC). This committee has a remit focused upon quality assurance and enhancement, student experience and engagement, TEF strategy, and setting and implementing the University strategy. The LTQC sets the strategic direction for quality assurance and enhancement and for the review and monitoring of quality and standards. The quality of taught programmes and the postgraduate research student experience are overseen by the LTQC. Postgraduate research strategy falls within the remit of the Committee for Research and Innovation Strategy (CRIS).

103 In exercising its responsibility for monitoring adherence to academic regulations and policies, the LTQC is supported by a network of sub-committees. The development of academic quality is augmented cross-institutionally by four academies - covering learning and teaching, student employability, learner success, and Welsh-medium provision. Operational oversight of regulatory matters is exercised by Academic Quality Services (AQS), which provides guidance on the management of quality and standards. The institutional-level quality infrastructure is complemented by cross-college deliberative committees, and cross-university communities of practice that facilitate the engagement of the wider academic community and shared responsibility for the management of quality and university performance. College-level Learning and Teaching Committees, reporting to LTQC, and into which Boards of Studies report, are responsible for setting college enhancement priorities and for monitoring the student experience. The management of quality is further supported at college level by directors of learning and teaching (DLT) and programme directors. These arrangements are augmented on a cross-university basis by the DLT Forum. There are guides for students and staff on quality assurance matters such as programme and module design and development.

104 The University's quality system incorporates student representation at all levels of formal decision-making, and involvement in monitoring and review processes. The review team noted examples of student input into university learning and teaching enhancement priorities, such as action to address assessment and feedback. The University has further enhanced the student contribution to the management of the quality of learning through the establishment of a Student Opinion Panel and a Student Review Community; the latter involving students in quinquennial quality reviews. Students confirmed that such opportunities are highly valued.

105 The review team paid close attention to these academic governance and quality assurance arrangements when considering the University's response to the COVID-19 pandemic (see commendation in Section 4.7).

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

106 The University's approach to setting, maintaining, reviewing, and assessing academic standards includes processes for programme approval and review. The review team saw extensive evidence of regulations and processes for the rigorous assessment of student attainment and the application of appropriate standards for awards (see Section 4.7).

107 Portfolio management, an area of focus for this review, extends across the programme life cycle - from initial proof of concept to programme approval. The Programme Management Board, the Planning and Strategic Projects Unit, and the Market Intelligence Team use the business planning process to review the viability of provision and to identify new areas of strategic priority. The review team noted examples where major investment in strategic initiatives, informed by Welsh Government priorities, has been successfully taken forward.

108 Academic staff work with internal and external stakeholders to design programmes. Where programmes are developed with collaborative partners, due diligence procedures are used. An online Programme Approval Management system hosts definitive programme information. The AQS scrutinises new programme development proposals, though authority regarding final decisions on the quality and standards of programmes rests with the Programme Approval Committee (PAC). A college or school's academic portfolio is reviewed at least annually through the Annual Portfolio Review process to ensure continued viability. The review team noted the depth of internal and external expertise involved in the work of the PAC (see Section 4.3). Meetings with staff confirmed that these arrangements are understood and work effectively. The review team **commends** 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.

109 Following the approval of a programme, it is subject to quality assurance arrangements for programme management and review. The team noted that to achieve greater integration between annual and periodic review, and a more holistic data-informed approach, the University has implemented a revised approach to quality review (see Section 4.5). This incorporates: annual programme review (APR); module review and amendment, withdrawal or suspension; and a quinquennial review cycle for the review of a subject area or programme. Proposals for module amendments are approved by the PAC. The APR process requires programme teams to reflect on student evaluation, student performance, and external examiner reports, and to evaluate against standard metrics. The ARQUE system has been enhanced to improve data accessibility (see Sections 4.5 and 4.8). Local oversight is exercised by Boards of Studies, and action plans from the APR process are integrated in college and subject area Student Experience Action Plans which are monitored by college LTCs. AQS reviews all APRs with institutional issues being raised at LTQC or Progression and Awards Board (PAB), as appropriate. A new committee, the ADQC, takes a proactive role in monitoring action plans arising from the quality review process (see Section 4.5).

110 The review team noted that due to the pandemic, quinquennial reviews have been rescheduled for early 2021. While procedures for the assessment, amendment, and suspension or withdrawal of programmes have been modified through the introduction of emergency regulatory changes, appropriate rigour and regulatory discipline has been maintained in arrangements for setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards (see Section 4.7).

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

111 Through regular process review, and scanning of the external regulatory environment, the University ensures that academic programmes and awards comply with external academic reference points, statutory requirements, and sound regulatory practice. Academic regulations and internal codes of practice are underpinned by administrative arrangements and quality processes that take account of external reference points.

112 Compliance with the academic baseline requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales (QAFW), and Part 1 of the ESG is assured through comprehensive mapping of university regulations, processes and procedures against external reference points. Institutional documentation confirms that processes for the approval, review, and assurance of standards, of academic programmes are referenced to the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* (FHEQ), the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the *Credit and Qualifications Framework Wales* (CQFW), and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Accountability requirements to HEFCW under the QAFW are met through Council and Senate reports on quality assurance which are in accordance with HEFCW Guidance on Regulated Institutions, and Fee and Access Plans. National priorities are met through the design and delivery of degree apprenticeships. The review team concluded that regulatory arrangements, guidance and procedures are understood by staff, are applied consistently, and updated as required.

113 The University makes extensive use of external expertise in processes for the approval and review of its programmes and awards. Programmes are subject to the oversight of external examiners, who are trained by AQS on university regulatory matters. A policy has been introduced for reciprocal arrangements for the appointment of external examiners drawn from comparator universities. All new, reviewed and amended programmes are scrutinised by an external subject specialist (ESS), drawn from comparator universities.

114 A number of programmes are subject to the accreditation requirements of PSRBs, and processes are aligned to these. The review team saw evidence of how academic areas engage with PSRBs and respond to PSRB conditions and recommendations. Use is made of employer input into design, approval and review processes. Employers with whom the review team met spoke positively of their involvement. The review team confirmed that since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the introduction of regulatory and other changes, the engagement of external examiners, subject specialists, PSRBs and employers in university processes has continued remotely.

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

115 The 2014 QAA review found that the University met UK expectations for standards and quality, and commended the provider on the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The report made two recommendations and affirmed action on two matters. The recommendations related, respectively, to approaches to the moderation of assessed work, and the oversight of student achievement on PGR programmes. The recommendations were addressed through an action plan overseen by LTQC and Senate.

116 The moderation process is now underpinned by a policy on moderation. Module coordinators stipulate the moderation approach adopted in student module handbooks (see Section 4.7). The team noted that the University has put in place a postgraduate Research Management System (RMS), incorporating a PGR data 'Dashboard', a records system which facilitates strategic analysis of student metrics and demographics and oversight of student

candidature and performance. The review team concluded that the University has made good progress in addressing each recommendation.

117 The University has made other improvements to its approach to quality assurance and enhancement. Key changes include a refreshed academic quality infrastructure (see Section 4.1); streamlined Integrated Quality Review process, supported by internal codes of practice (see Section 4.2); PGR infrastructure improvements that include the establishment of a PGR Office and the appointment of a Dean of PGR; the embedding of portfolio management and review within the business planning process (see Sections 4.2 and 4.5); and the establishment of ADQC (see Sections 4.2, 4.5 and 4.8). The review team considers that these changes, and the University's responses to the 2014 recommendations, reflect a culture of enhancement and improvement.

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

118 The University describes its approach to decision-making and evaluation as 'data-informed'. This approach is intended to enable colleges and schools to identify matters that may require action at university level, thereby facilitating robust decision-making for the enhancement of the student experience.

119 The review team noted a range of examples of data being used systematically for evaluation and improvement purposes. Extensive use is made of sector benchmarking data, such as HESA data on progression, retention and awards; analysis of league table positioning for benchmarking against comparator groups; and performance monitoring in areas such as graduate employability. The University has introduced a portfolio management process based on market analysis, which is used in planning new subject areas (see Section 4.2). The University's portfolio review process, led annually by the Programme Management Board (PMB), incorporates UCAS and HESA data to identify academic provision that may be subject to withdrawal or suspension. The review team noted that the APR process enables programme teams to utilise data from internal and external sources for review and enhancement purposes. The team also learned that self-evaluation for quinquennial Quality Review is data-focused and draws on a range of external and internal sources.

120 The review team confirmed that these arrangements are well documented, and that the aims are broadly understood by staff. However, in its Self-evaluative Analysis the University acknowledged the varying ability of key staff at programme level to make full use of data, and the need to make further progress in securing the full roll-out of changes introduced in decision-making and review processes. The review team was encouraged to learn that the University is taking steps to address these matters.

121 Power BI (Business Intelligence) has been introduced as the main platform to facilitate improved access to internal and external data, including through Assessment Reports on the Quality of University Examinations (ARQUE) and a PGR Dashboard. Several stages of the project have been completed. The review team learned that ARQUE reports have now been enhanced for use in the programme and module review process. Data on module outcomes is complemented by student evaluation data captured through the EvaSys system. Further, the University has established the ADQC with a remit to review these matters and to make recommendations to the LTQC. Responsibilities include streamlining the accessibility of data on academic performance, securing an improved overview of the academic data landscape, and identifying the necessary portals and processes to achieve this. By monitoring college Student Experience Action Plans, which report on student feedback data, the ADQC contributes to a more effective system for making informed decisions on the enhancement of the student experience (see Section 4.2). Documentation and meetings with staff confirmed that good progress is being made in taking these

initiatives forward. The review team **affirms** the actions being taken to address the deficiencies that the University has identified in the use and availability of data for decision-making, evaluation and review purposes.

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

122 The University's commitment to quality enhancement is illustrated in its Learning and Teaching Enhancement Plan (2019-20). One of the University's current enhancement themes is the portfolio management process, an area commended by the review team (see Section 4.2). This process ensures that best practice in assessment, entrepreneurial skills, and innovative teaching, is incorporated in approved programmes. The APR process is used for the identification and sharing of good practice in learning and teaching. The LTQC and college DLTs contribute to dissemination at college Learning and Teaching Committees and Boards of Studies. Further, the AQS and PAB, respectively, compile overview reports identifying issues for improvement and areas of good practice arising from review processes and external examiner reports. These arrangements for enhancement are complemented by the activities of the University's academies and communities of practice. University processes for quality review have been strengthened through improvements to the use made of data for evaluation purposes, (see Section 4.5). Institutional documentation and meetings held by the review team confirmed that staff are fully engaged with these arrangements (see Sections 4.2 and 4.4).

123 The effectiveness of the University's approach to quality for enhancement purposes is evidenced by a number of indicators. Although first-degree student numbers have increased over the past five years by some 50%, overall student satisfaction in the NSS has remained at a consistently high level while progression and retention rates compare favourably with the University's HESA benchmark. The proportion of first and upper second-class degrees awarded is comparable with the sector. Achievements in teaching and research have been recognised by the award of a TEF Gold rating for teaching excellence in 2018, and results in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework.

124 The effectiveness of the University's approach to quality to enhance learning and teaching has been confirmed by the use made of quality processes to maintain continuity in learning, teaching and the student experience in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (see commendation, Section 3.2).

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

125 The University's academic quality infrastructure and academic regulations provide a framework for setting and maintaining the standards of academic awards (see Sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3).

126 The student-focused dimension of the University's regulatory environment is overseen through the Academic Regulations and Cases Board (ARCB). Annual reports on appeals, complaints and disciplinary matters are made to the ARCB and PAB, and to the Students' Union and University Council. The regulatory environment is further underpinned by the system for managing academic integrity and misconduct. Students with whom the review team met confirmed the availability of information on regulatory matters.

127 The University's arrangements for maintaining academic standards include the rigorous use made of external examiners in processes for the assessment of students (see Section 4.3). Their reports, together with annual digests and committee minutes, confirm that programmes meet relevant subject benchmarks, and the requirements of the FHEQ and PSRBs, and that administrative arrangements for progression and awards decisions conform



to regulations. External examiners review the moderation of marking to ensure that policy is applied in accordance with university requirements on academic standards (see Section 4.4).

128 In reflecting on these arrangements, the review team considered actions taken by the University in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A safety net approach, designed to mitigate the effects on student outcomes and academic progression, accompanied by emergency modifications to learning and teaching policies and regulations, including extenuating circumstances, were implemented across the University. Institutional documentation and working papers provided evidence that the University acted in a timely and robust manner and confirmed that the design and development of the Safety Net Policy was informed by sound academic quality principles and effective engagement with quality structures and processes. The team noted that the summer assessment period was reconfigured and that the transition to remote alternative examination and assessment arrangements was welcomed by students. External examiners were engaged remotely, and the use made of the module amendment process and online moderation of marking ensured system robustness and good module governance. The Review Team **commends** 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.

129 The review team learned that the University had identified concerns regarding assessment, as expressed by students in external and internal survey data. The University took the view that while overall performance in surveys was positive, there was potential for improved outcomes in assessment and feedback practice. This has been identified by the LTQC as an institutional enhancement theme. In addition to consulting on an update of the current policy, an appointment has been made to a position of Dean of Assessment and Feedback to steer university-wide initiatives. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken by the University to enhance policy and practice in assessment and feedback.

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

130 The review team noted that the University has improved the accessibility of data for evaluation and decision-making purposes. Extensive use is made of market intelligence data to inform the management of the academic portfolio. The introduction of the Power BI platform facilitates improved access to internal and external data for Programme Directors. Data from student experience surveys are used in quality review processes. Graduate outcomes data, which inform the University's employability strategy, are used for self-evaluation in annual and quinquennial reviews. Further, the ARQUE system provides information on module outcomes and performance, while EvaSys provides programme teams with student evaluation data, thereby strengthening review and evaluation within the APR process. At PGR level, the PGR 'Dashboard' has enhanced data capture of student metrics for staff, while students access information on their progress through e:Vision (see Section 4.4). The Progression and Awards Board (PAB) considers student attainment outcomes at award and programme level, while the Power BI platform identifies 'outlier' modules for consideration in review processes.

The review team endorses these developments, and welcomes the establishment of the ADQC, which is responsible for overseeing and reviewing the accessibility and quality of performance-related data, and for making recommendations on improvement. This committee takes a cross-university view of the APR process and the completion of actions identified in college and school Student Experience Action Plans, which are monitored by

college LTCs. The management of quality issues is assisted by the broad membership of ADQC, including student representatives (see affirmation in Section 4.5).

## 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)

131 The University recognises that its portfolio of collaborative programmes is relatively small scale, but considers that it delivers significant benefits to the University, its students, and the surrounding area, in line with the University's Strategic Plan 2020, Research and Innovation Strategy 2017-20, and draft Internationalisation Strategy 2020-25, currently in development. The University has well-established intercalated year and study abroad opportunities - mostly exchanges involving credit transfer rather than full awards, in line with the Student Mobility Strategy, to offer every student a mobility opportunity. The University has a number of UK-based partnerships which take the form of validated or franchise arrangements, and foundation degrees and degree apprenticeships developed in partnership with industry and further education. Many of these partnerships are college based, building on links to individual members of staff in relation to curriculum, industry or research synergies. Link tutors are in place for collaborative programmes. In recent years, the University has begun to develop strategic partnerships, such as those with Université Grenoble Alpes and Texas A&M University and the developing collaboration with Wuhan University.

132 The main features of the University's collaborative strategy are: addressing strategic interests for the Welsh Government to drive economic growth and foster the prosperity of Wales - including partnering with local health boards, regional further education partners, schools and cultural resources worldwide; enhancing long-standing synergistic collaboration with industry, business, commerce and third sectors; promoting the international nature of the University; creating sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships including a small number of key international strategic partners (Université Grenoble Alpes, University of Central Oklahoma, Accademia per lo Sviluppo dell'Osteopatia e della Medicina Integrativa (ASOMI)) supporting students to achieve career aspirations through work-based learning experiences including abroad, opportunities for personal and professional practice, years in industry, and study abroad. In addition, due diligence and quality assurance procedures operate in partnership with employers to regulate teaching and learning quality and standards. Employers described close liaison with the University and continuity of work placements and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (see commendation in Section 3.2).

133 The University infrastructure to manage and support these programmes features: an International Development Office - much involved with recruitment and also on-the-ground support for international students, particularly during the pandemic; the Directorate of Marketing, Recruitment and International; and the associated Academic Partnerships Department which manages collaborations, involving the award of a degree or credits.

134 The University is committed to the effective management of its collaborative activity, and to ensuring that quality assurance, student experience and the standards of its awards are robust. The approach is proportionate and risk-based and is governed by core principles laid out in the Code of Practice for Collaborative Partnerships.

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

135 The University has a number of UK-based validated or franchise arrangements, and foundation degrees and degree apprenticeships in partnership with industry and further education. These include a partnership with Coleg Cambria and Airbus built around the

expertise of both the University and Coleg Cambria in Aeronautical Engineering, and the needs of the aeronautical manufacturing industry in North Wales. Such degree apprenticeships are new to the University and to Wales. The University provides a range of credit and non-credit bearing work-based learning placements and opportunities for students, as part of a degree programme, or as extra-curricular activity. The responsibility for providing this wide range of opportunities rests with the whole university and involves collaboration between colleges, professional services and the academies. For example, the degree in Enhanced Paramedic Practice enables paramedics registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), to undertake work-based learning and practice development and gain academic credit for their learning. Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol collaborates with higher education providers on the delivery of Gaelic and the Welsh language.

136 For international provision, the University is developing an institutional approach, characterised by strategic alignment and supported by a Go Global team who issue an annual report which shows over 700 global placements in 2018-19 - an increase of over 30% against previous years. In addition, the University has strategic partnerships with the University of Central Oklahoma, Texas A&M University, and Université Grenoble Alpes, while developing new partnerships with ASOMI in Italy to deliver BSc Osteopathy, and with Wuhan University. The University offers joint supervision of some research degrees or doctoral research at other academic or industrial organisations, including the University of Central Oklahoma. The number of collaborative partners has risen steadily from 24 in 2015-16 to 54 in 2018-19. Future expansion is intended to be measured, and currently focuses on transnational education. The expansion strategy will be in line with the principles laid out in Section 5.1 and the finalised Internationalisation Strategy 2020-25, currently in development. This includes an International Recruitment Step Change Programme, which has resulted in a steady rise in international students over the last five years.

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

137 Signed collaboration agreements are in place for all domestic and international partnerships. The review team saw comprehensive evidence of due diligence processes for these programmes. Following completion of the approval process, collaborative programmes enter the normal quality assurance processes of the University (they are effectively reviewed under the University's APR process). Management oversight of collaborative programmes is the responsibility of the relevant college with support, where required, from the Academic Partnerships Department. A Link Tutor is appointed for academic liaison purposes. Periodic and annual reviews (if applicable) of collaborative partnerships fall under the oversight of the Collaborative Programmes Board and Programme Approval Committee, while oversight of the operation of Joint Boards of Studies, annual programme review and assessment is the responsibility of the relevant college.

138 International students were kept informed about the option to return home, and any adjustments to assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that many students had an interrupted mobility experience at this time on the grounds of safety, but there is no change to the mobility strategy overall. The review team heard from an international student about the welcome and practical support given to them on arrival in the UK and when transitioning into the University, which meant that they rapidly felt part of the university community. Students from Coleg Cambria described feeling well supported in their work, that the University had invested in specialist software to allow them to work from home, and that they had had no issues in gathering assessment evidence for their portfolios. Arrangements for supporting collaborative students appear to be effective, with online working being described by students as well managed, and the University is seen as having

a good understanding of working students. Students described professional services as 'the heartbeat of this University' and being extremely responsive to enquiries (see commendations in Sections 2.1 and 4.7).

**QAA2570 - R10478 - Feb 21**

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Cambrian Buildings, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff CF10 5FL  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786  
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