



Quality Enhancement Review of University of South Wales

Outcome Report

July 2022

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This report is published in both English and Welsh.

About the Quality Enhancement Review method

The QAA website explains the method for [Quality Enhancement Review \(QER\)](#) and has links to the QER handbook and other informative documents.¹ For 2021-22, the scope of QERs focused on quality assurance in line with the changes made by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) to external quality assurance requirements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, QAA published an addendum to accompany the QER handbook which explains the adaptations to the method delivery. For 2021-22, providers have the opportunity to engage with QAA separately on quality enhancement. 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 University of South Wales. The review visit took place online from 4 to 6 July 2022. The review was conducted by a team of three reviewers:

- Professor John Baldock
- Dr Tim Burton
- Dr 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 4, 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/University-of-South-Wales

About University of South Wales

The University of South Wales was established following a merger of the University of Glamorgan and the University of Wales, Newport in 2013. The University has campuses in Pontypridd, Cardiff and Newport. In terms of student numbers, the University is the second largest university in Wales. The University is the head of a Group that includes the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD) and The College Merthyr Tydfil. They are both wholly owned subsidiary companies of the University.

The vision of the University is 'Changing lives and our world for a better tomorrow: USW will be a leading UK university, maximising positive impact for our students, partners, and communities'. The University's strategy, USW 2030 Strategy, launched in early 2020, sets out the direction of the University for the next 10 years. There is an implementation plan and Strategy Implementation Group to guide the next phase of work which involves four key workstreams addressing themes from curriculum design principles, and research impact and reach, to enterprise skills development and stakeholder management.

The University's academic provision is organised into three faculties: Computing, Engineering and Science; Business and Creative Industries; and Life Sciences and Education. Faculties are structured into schools and subject areas.

For 2020-21, there were 31,440 students in total registered with the University, 8,290 of these are offshore. Home student numbers have remained relatively stable over the last five years. In terms of full-time equivalent or FTEs (all students) there are 17,830. The University has experienced a reduction in part-time enrolments driven by changes in fee regimes; however, the University remains the second largest provider of part-time education in Wales. The University has experienced growth in international student recruitment which has continued into 2021-22. There are currently 300 postgraduate research students.

The University has a variety of collaborative arrangements with over 40 organisations based in the UK and overseas. Partner institutions teach a significant proportion of total students registered on courses leading to awards made by the University. In the academic year 2021-22, approximately 30% of registered students were being taught off-campus by partner institutions in Wales, England or other countries outside the UK.

The University was previously reviewed by QAA in 2015 which resulted in two areas of good practice being identified and nine recommendations. Three of the recommendations specifically related to research degrees: the need for appropriate and effective representation for all postgraduate research students, recording of postgraduate research supervisor training, and the appropriate regulation of all master's by research and professional doctorate courses within the award framework. The University has taken steps to address these areas in full, ensuring research students are represented on committees and prepared for their role. Record keeping of supervisor training and its oversight has been implemented and both research degree and taught degree regulations have been appropriately updated.

Two of the 2015 recommendations related to the accuracy of published information about the provider's provision. The University has taken appropriate steps to ensure oversight of published information by collaborative partners as well as introducing procedures to ensure all published course information is checked for accuracy. There were two other information-related recommendations. One was to make external examiner reports more accessible to students. These reports are now available on the course VLE and access promoted through course handbooks. The other was to ensure all centrally held course specifications were up to date and inclusive of non-standard provision and definitive records of all courses are now kept.

The review found weaknesses in the tracking and monitoring of timeliness and nature of assessment feedback at University-level. In response to this recommendation, the University has taken a number of steps to address assessment bunching, to simplify the approach to assessment and to evaluate the effectiveness of the process. The introduction of continuous monitoring in 2018-19 allows the University to monitor assessment on an ongoing basis.

Finally, the University has reviewed the partner process contained in the Quality Manual and created a separate Partnerships Manual to address the recommendation to review the University's due diligence policy and procedures for collaborative partners.

Judgements about University of South Wales

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

- University of South Wales **meets** the requirements of the ESG Part 1 for internal quality assurance.
- University of South Wales **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 clear focus on strategic aims across the University, developed and implemented in partnership with students, that creates a cohesive approach to the enhancement of learning, teaching, and assessment.
- The University's considered, well informed and effectively communicated response to the pandemic, which has enabled the University to reduce the impact on students and staff and to provide a positive foundation for active learning.
- The University's extensive engagement with external guidance, expertise and networks which has positively informed their management of academic standards and enhancement of the student experience.
- The comprehensive availability and use of data that is embedded in quality processes, and which enables timely and informed decisions that enhance the student experience.
- The well-managed partnerships with the five Strategic Alliance further education colleges which meet the needs of local students and regional employers.

Affirmations

The QER has identified an affirmation, which is summarised below.

- The steps being taken to ensure that external examiner reports clearly distinguish between the University's on-campus provision and that delivered at each partner college.

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](#).

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