Quality Enhancement Review of University of South Wales

Technical Report

July 2022

Contents

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 Technical 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).

In advance of the review visit, the provider submitted a self-evaluative document (the Self-evaluative Analysis) 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 in 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.[3]

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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[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] Outcome Report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/University-of-South-Wales

Overarching judgement about University of South Wales

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.

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

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

1   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.

2   The RWCMD is the National Conservatoire of Wales and is a leading UK provider of specialist practical and performance-based training in music, drama and related professions. With 897 students, RWCMD awards University of South Wales degrees. It has devolved responsibility for quality and standards working within the University's framework and operates its own Governing and Academic Boards. RWCMD has this academic year had a successful review by an independent European accreditation and external evaluation body for music, Music Quality Enhancement (MusiQue), which is registered on the European Quality Assurance Register.

3   The College Merthyr Tydfil is described as a community college contributing to the economy of the Heads of the Valleys region. It offers a range of undergraduate courses validated by the University.

4   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 strategic plan is supported by four further plans: a People Plan, Estates Plan, Digital Plan and Strategic Equality Plan.

5   The University's academic provision is organised in three faculties: Computing, Engineering and Science; Business and Creative Industries; and Life Sciences and Education. Faculties are structured into schools and subject areas for managerial and administrative purposes. Each faculty is led by a dean who is a member of the Senior Management Team and who reports to the Deputy Vice Chancellor.

6   The Board of Governors is responsible for strategic direction and oversight while the Executive Team, chaired by the Vice Chancellor, leads on institutional management. The Executive includes the Deputy Vice Chancellor, the Chief Operating Officer, Pro Vice Chancellor (Innovation and Engagement), Pro Vice Chancellor (Research), Director of Organisational Development and Chief Finance Officer. Executive is supported by the wider Senior Management Team of the University. Academic Board is the key academic body which is supported by several subcommittees/groups (see paragraph 22).

7   Notable changes since the previous QAA review in 2015 have included: the appointment of a new Chair of the Board of Governors, Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer; the reduction in the number of faculties from four to three; the establishment of an Academic Registry; the opening and subsequent closure of a branch campus in Dubai; and the launch of the new USW 2030 Strategy and sub-strategies and plans.

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

8   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. Again, FTEs have remained relatively stable over the same period. 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 with increased applications for 2022-23. There are currently 300 postgraduate research students.

9   The University has experienced some challenges in the number of undergraduate enrolments due to increased competition in markets local to the University and reducing numbers in some subject areas. However, overall numbers of full-time undergraduate numbers have held up through sustained increases in commissioned health provision and increases in degree apprenticeship numbers. Numbers in postgraduate taught provision have increased across the five-year period in line with sector growth.

10   The USW 2030 Strategy is underpinned by seven critical success factors (CSFs) with a focus on maximising graduate success and opportunities and a specific CSF to increase the University's market share both in Wales and within their competitor group year on year. Other CSFs relate to improving student retention, satisfaction and outcomes.

11   The University's retention and completion rates show improvement over the five-year period 2015-16 to 2019-20 in relation to sector benchmarks. The University is undertaking further work to understand subject-level performance and differences in demographic groups in more detail. The University aims to be above sector average for the proportion of full-time undergraduate students in higher education one year following year of entry.

1.3   Commentary on the preparation for the review, including how the provider and students worked in partnership in review preparation

12   The University established a steering group to oversee its preparations for the review. The membership of the group, chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor, drew on senior academic and professional support staff and included the President of the Students' Union and representatives from collaborative partner further education colleges and the USW Pathway College. The Steering Group formally reported to Academic Board and

Quality Assurance Committee. Briefings were provided to the Board of Governors and other University and faculty-level committees. From a collaborative partner perspective, the Partner Oversight Group and Partnership Quality Sub-Committee (PQSC) were also briefed. The University promoted engagement with staff through open 'drop-in' briefings, a webpage dedicated to the review, updates via the Vice Chancellor's blog and posts to the University's intranet.

13   The University involved the student body in its preparations for the review in a number of ways. The Chief Operating Officer and the President of the Students' Union were members of the QER Steering Group. There are student members of the key committees where regular updates were provided - Academic Board, Quality Assurance Committee and Faculty Committees. Furthermore, regular meetings were held by the Institutional Facilitator with the Students' Union and involving the Student Voice Team to ensure information sharing and engagement about the University's submission and to provide support in preparation of the student submission. A set of communications was published for students via the student portal.

14   The University embraced the flexibility afforded by the adaptations made to the review process for 2021-22 by producing a single submission document combining a self-evaluative analysis and change report.

15   The Students' Union undertook a survey of the student body, including students in representative roles and postgraduate students. This formed the basis of a podcast submission and supporting commentary.

1.4   Summary of the provider's follow-up to the previous review

16   The University was previously reviewed by QAA in 2015 which resulted in two areas of good practice being identified and nine recommendations. USW provided the review team with evidence of how it had addressed each of the recommendations.

17   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. In terms of student representation, the University made changes in 2015 to ensure committees (and committees created since then) have had research student representation. New student representatives are appropriately prepared for their committee role and the Graduate School introduces new student representatives to existing students within their faculty. For record keeping of supervisor training, Faculty Research Degree Committees are responsible for identifying whether supervisors have attended training or training has lapsed which is reported to Faculty Executive. Finally, changes were made to the regulations in 2015 in response to the recommendation on the regulation of MRes and professional doctorate courses. Regulations for taught courses now specify the nature of master's by research and that only the taught element of professional doctorates is subject to the taught regulations with appropriate cross-referencing to the Regulations for Research Degrees.

18   Two of the 2015 recommendations related to information about the provider's provision: the accuracy of information published by partners and the absence of systematic monitoring of module and course information by the University. The University identified a potential gap in process regarding the audit process for monitoring of the published information of partners and oversight of this activity has been made the responsibility of PQSC. Furthermore, partner-specific marketing guidance, containing detailed responsibilities for accuracy of published information, has been developed and implemented. The University has taken a number of steps to ensure the ongoing accuracy and relevance of course

information with Marketing and Student Recruitment playing a key role in reviewing all printed and online course information. Another information-related recommendation was the finding that students had minimal engagement with external examiner reports. External examiner reports are now made available on the course VLE and information about how to find these is included in course handbooks. This was checked by a Quality Institutional Audit in 2020-21.

19   The 2015 review found that the tracking and monitoring of the timeliness as well as the nature of assessment feedback lacked systematic and routine tracking at University-level. The University has introduced an annual assessment dialogue and approval exercise to address the concerns regarding assessment bunching and is evaluating the effectiveness of the process in the current academic year. The University has established a 20-working day deadline for the return of marked work. A recent review of the University's Assessment Tariff was designed to promote a level of consistency between modules across faculties and to minimise the risk of assessment overload for both students and academics. The University's continuous monitoring process, introduced in 2018/19, allows processes such as assessment to be monitored on an ongoing basis (see paragraphs 23 and 24) with reporting at faculty level and Academic Board.

20   The previous review found that some course specifications held on the University's central database were not always up to date and did not include non-standard provision. A project was established to ensure a definitive record of every course and the course file amended to include information about non-standard provision.

21   Finally, the 2015 review recommended the review of the University's due diligence policy and procedures for collaborative partners. This has been addressed through reconsideration of the partner process contained in the Quality Manual and the creation of a separate Partnerships Manual. Further processes have also been undertaken to clarify processes.

2 Academic standards and quality processes

2.1 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

22   The University's Board of Governors are ultimately responsible for quality assurance at the University. This responsibility is delegated to the University's Academic Board, which in turn delegates to the Quality Assurance Committee, Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee and Research Committee. Each of these groups, including the Board of Governors, has a Students' Union (SU) sabbatical officer as a full member. At faculty level, the structure mirrors the University-level committee structure with Faculty Quality Assurance Committees, Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees and Faculty Research Degree Committees, which each report upwards to their respective parent committee. Quality processes at the University are guided by the Quality Handbook and the Partnerships Handbook.

23   Since the 2018/19 academic year, the University has been implementing a risk-based approach to quality by which the main system for quality assurance is their continuous monitoring process. This means that reviews of course and module quality are not confined to a single timepoint in the academic year. Instead, continuous monitoring action plans are updated and considered throughout the academic year.

24   The main oversight of the completion and quality of course-level continuous monitoring action plans lies with faculty-level Quality Assurance Committees, and specifically their continuous monitoring subgroups which are chaired by the Faculty Deputy Deans. As well as faculty-level oversight of course action plans there are also school and faculty-level annual reports and action plans which are overseen by the Quality Assurance Committee. A summary of the continuous monitoring reports is included in the Annual Assurance Statements which are confirmed by the Board of Governors.

25   An annual report on quality matters at the University has been produced since 2019 by Academic Board and its subcommittees, as well as incorporating the SU's annual quality reports. The Board of Governors undertakes an effectiveness review every four years and Academic Board undertakes its own effectiveness review in a mirror process.

26   In terms of student involvement, the student representative system is managed by the SU. There are two types of student representative, which are Student Voice Representatives (SVRs) at faculty level and Course Representatives at course level. SVRs sit on faculty and institutional-level committees. The SVRs also complete a research project each year with an opportunity to make recommendations to Academic Board. Course Representatives are elected by their peers and sit on the Student Staff Course Liaison Groups (SSLGs), which are convened termly. Relevant and thorough training is provided for both roles by the SU. Students are also paid to be involved in validation events and are expected to be consulted as part of the revalidation process.

27   The general student body is consulted through surveys, which are coordinated through an internal survey mechanism called LOOP. The question-set administered through LOOP is open to students all year, but there are drives for responses in November and February which focus primarily on shorter mid-term feedback questions, and another drive at the end of the teaching year with a longer question set. Individual services, like the library, may also undertake their own surveys, though recent developments in response to students reporting being over-surveyed have led to an approval system being put in place to coordinate survey activity at an institutional level.

28   Routes for representation for research students exist at institution and faculty level. There is a Research Committee that has three research student representatives and which reports to Academic Board. There are also three Faculty Research Committees, who report to the central Research Committee. One of the primary mechanisms for engagement with research students is the Graduate School, which was established in 2018; there is a Graduate School Board that reports to the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee.

29   The University has recently established the 2030 Curriculum Project as part of its 2030 strategic plan to guide its management of learning and teaching and aims to co-design teaching with students. The 2030 Curriculum Project was designed with input from students, including their opinions about how they could be more involved in curriculum design. Students also now co-chair some of the Strategic Implementation Groups that are responsible for the implementation of the strategic goals, ensuring that the student voice is heard and that there is a direct link to students' experiences of learning and teaching. Alignment with the principles of the 2030 Curriculum is a required section on course re/validation documents which ensures that it is fully embedded.

30   Although the implementation of the new curriculum project has been delayed by the pandemic there is a clear plan moving forwards, and the review team noted the consistent and cohesive approach to integrating the new strategic approach in learning and teaching throughout their meetings with all levels of staff and also some students. As such, the review team **commends** 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.

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

31   The University has detailed processes for setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards set out in the University's Quality Framework which comprises: the Regulations for Taught Courses, Regulations for Research Degrees, the Quality Manual, the Partnership Manual and additional Mandatory Academic Procedures and Student Casework Regulations. Oversight is achieved through scrutiny of a series of detailed annual reports by Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and Academic Board. QAC produces its own annual report for Academic Board providing a summary of its business in the preceding year. The University's oversight of academic standards is further evidenced in the Annual Assurance Statements to the Board of Governors.

32   In its Self-evaluative Analysis, the University focuses on the work to implement an effective risk-based approach to securing academic standards. The review team considered carefully written documentation provided to evidence this approach and discussed the experience of it with staff from the University and its partner providers. The risk-based approach, first introduced in 2018-19, is at the heart of course validation, continuous monitoring and course review and revalidation. At the same time, the University has sought to ensure that there is clear strategic direction in decisions about which courses to deliver, and which courses to stop delivering, as well as in the design of those courses. This process includes an annual strategic planning process at faculty level and oversight by the Portfolio Oversight Group (POG).

33   The approval of new courses is a two-stage process which is set out in the Quality Manual: POG considers new proposals in the form of the Initial Course Proposal Form (ICPF) and Validation Panels are then held to approve individual courses. The faculty is responsible for identifying whether the proposal is low, medium or high-risk using criteria set out in the Quality Manual, and POG then confirms or varies that assessment. Proposals designated as high risk are subject to University-level approval; medium and low risk are

subject to faculty-level approval. The review team saw a number of examples of course proposals and reports produced by the validation panels which illustrated the implementation of the process.

34   Where a course is to be closed a Course Closure Action Plan must be completed by the course leader and then approved by POG and monitored (where appropriate) by FQAC. This plan is designed to ensure that the interests of applicants/students are safeguarded.

35   A significant feature of the University's risk-based approach is the process of continuous monitoring introduced to replace more traditional annual monitoring. Course leaders are required to produce a report and an action plan: the 'continuous' element being that these are reviewed and updated as necessary during the year. These reports and action plans are monitored by FQACs, which are now supported by subgroups devoted specifically to addressing continuous monitoring. Course-level reports lead to an annual report at school and then faculty level which then feed into reports to QAC and Academic Board.

36   Two elements of the continuous monitoring process are significant: the risk-rating for each course and the annual data calendar. Course leaders are required to assign a risk-rating to their course - high, moderate (or medium) and low; this is then reviewed and either confirmed or revised by the Head of School. The risk-rating is designed to act as a driver for other processes including, crucially, revalidation or perpetual validation. Course leaders are assisted in assigning a risk-rating to their courses by referring to a risk matrix. The annual data calendar is a table indicating month by month what new data will be available that month.

37   The University provided the review team with a series of documents which demonstrated the operation of continuous monitoring at course, school, faculty and university levels. These reports show that the process enables the University to identify courses where early intervention is required. Staff, including those at partner colleges, provided a consistent picture of a positive experience of engaging with the process, contrasting their experience of completing end-of-year annual monitoring reports. They highlighted the benefits for them of being able to reflect during the year on the effectiveness of their course and in having a mechanism which enabled quick recording of those reflections and identification of opportunities for enhancement.

38   In respect of provision at the University's partner colleges, a number of issues with the continuous monitoring process had been identified by the University in its Self-evaluative Analysis and supporting evidence. Discussion with staff from the partner colleges and with University staff who support collaborative provision indicated that significant progress is being made to address these issues, a view reflected in the Partnerships Continuous Monitoring Annual Report 2020-21. Staff at partner colleges are supported by training which is valued by them.

39   The University has established processes for course and module modifications. A modifications matrix is used to determine the type of approval process and is supported by guidance for staff.

40   Course review and revalidation begins with a critical review (or self-evaluation) undertaken by the course team which involves completing a very detailed and informative template, which is then reviewed by a Critical Review Panel to determine whether the course should undergo revalidation or whether it is eligible for perpetual validation. Significantly, the University is now starting to use this process to evidence how effectively courses are engaging with the 2030 Curriculum Principles. A revalidation schedule is maintained by QAC. Course review is under-pinned by risk assessment in that the standard requirement for review every six years can be reduced for courses identified as high risk and extended - in

the form of what the University calls 'perpetual validation' - for courses rated low risk.

41   Senior staff emphasised the flexibility of the process, allowing full revalidation where this was considered appropriate for a course including to address market need or a change in PSRB requirements. They also considered that the major modifications procedure had transformed the approach in ensuring an effective means for making changes short of full revalidation to ensure the continued integrity of the course. Course leaders indicated that they had found the revalidation process valuable in enabling effective self-evaluation of the provision, including effective use of data and addressing what industry wanted from the courses in terms of the University's graduates.

42   The University has detailed processes governing all aspects of assessment. The Self-evaluative Analysis focused on changes which have been undertaken to ensure that key aspects of assessment are aligned with the University's 2030 Strategy and supporting documents.

43   In May 2022, the University approved a new Assessment for Learning Policy. This demonstrates a positive and forward-looking approach to assessment and its role in promoting student learning as well as ensuring reliable and secure assessment outcomes. It includes an implementation table which also identifies processes and guidance to support staff and to enable monitoring. The University also reviewed its Assessment Tariff in 2021, with changes approved and ready for implementation at the start of the 2021-22 academic session.

44   Academic misconduct is addressed in the University's regulations which are amplified in the specific Academic Misconduct Regulations and Procedure 2021-22. Oversight of academic misconduct is achieved through a detailed annual report to QAC and to Academic Board. These reports are generated through the work of the Academic Integrity Committee and the Student Casework Unit (a subcommittee of QAC). Students who met with the review team spoke positively about their experience of the support provided by the University to help them understand what is expected of them, and what constitutes academic misconduct.

45   The University has signed the QAA Academic Integrity Charter and has undertaken a gap analysis of its practice compared with the Charter, including taking into account the guidance in the second edition of QAA's publication on Contract Cheating. This is a very serious and detailed piece of work by the University which provides extensive proposals for further work to strengthen the University's practice, including such matters as investigating technological solutions for identifying whether students have made use of essay mills.

46   The University has established processes for ensuring the involvement of external expertise in the design, approval and delivery of courses. In 2019, the University introduced a two-tier system of external examiners: Subject External Examiners (who attend the Subject Assessment Boards) and Super Progression and Award Examiners whose role is to help the University ensure that the progression and assessment process is conducted in line with the University's policies and regulations. A pool of eight 'Super Examiners' was established, who were not allocated to individual faculties to enable cross-University calibration.

47   Details of the process of appointment, terms of office, induction and training, and responsibilities of external examiners are set out in the Quality Manual. More detailed information on roles and responsibilities is provided in a clear and thorough External Examiner Handbook (which includes where appropriate, differentiating the two roles). External examiners are also provided with an annual training session. New external examiners are sent a copy of the previous year's report.

48   External examiners are required to submit an annual report using a pro forma, the contents of which are consistent with sector practice. Reports are submitted using an online system. Course teams, schools and faculties are required to engage with the feedback from the external examiner as part of the continuous monitoring process. External examiners receive a written institutional response addressing any issues raised in their report. The annual summary reports show that the University monitors the rate of completion of reports by the external examiners and has a proper understanding of why reports have not been completed.

49   Reports are made available to students via the VLE, and in November 2020 the University undertook an institutional quality audit to review the extent to which this was being achieved, with three recommendations being made.

50   The University identified in its Self-evaluative Analysis difficulties that it had experienced with providing a separate overview report on collaborative activity because of a lack of detail in external examiner reports relating to collaborative provision. Steps had been taken to address this through a revision of the external examiner report form, including making the requirement for information relating to collaborative provision mandatory from 2020-21. Furthermore, evidence provided to the review team suggested that some collaborative partners found the feedback less valuable when external examiners did not clearly distinguish which comments related to the specific college.

51   The review team explored the issue of feedback for individual partners with staff from the partner colleges and with staff at the University responsible for those partners. Staff from partners recognised the problem and indicated that progress was being made to address this. University staff were also clear that where an issue arose there were steps that they could take, including through the Partner Link Officer having a conversation with the external examiner to obtain more explicit information or, if necessary, returning the report to the external examiner for further information. Staff reported that other steps are being taken, including further revision of the external examiner report form for 2021-22 and focusing on the issue in the annual external examiner training session. The report pro forma makes explicit the right of the University to ask an external examiner to expand on their comments (on any aspect of the report). Based on the conversations with staff and the evidence provided, the review team concludes that the University is carefully addressing the issue and the team **affirms** 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.

52   The University's Self-Evaluative Analysis makes clear that the University responded strategically to the pandemic in two specific ways: through the development and implementation of a no detriment approach and through the development of the Digitally Enabled Active Learning Principles and Framework (DEAL) which was designed to guide the transition to, and delivery of, inclusive and accessible remote learning.

53   The review team noted three particular aspects of the way in which the University addressed the challenges of the pandemic. First, the way each iteration of its No Detriment approach was extensively informed by sector guidance and practice as well as by consultation and collaboration with staff, students, the Students' Union, external examiners and PSRBs. Second, the careful and systematic way in which it ensured that students and other stakeholders were kept up to date with the approach and its potential application. Third, the detailed evidence-based evaluation of its approach including through an analysis based on 2019-20 data.

54   DEAL was designed to provide resilience to courses to accommodate remote learning, on-campus return in some form, and future events that necessitate the closure or

restricted opening of campuses. The review team noted that the development of DEAL included a focus on inclusion and wellbeing for both students and staff and a focus on its implementation including through intensive staff training and the provision of supporting resources.

55   The University undertook an extensive evaluation of DEAL shortly before the review visit and has agreed a new version, which is essentially a re-working of the approach, called EAL, Enabling Active Learning. It is designed to use the best of what has been achieved in moving to digital provision during the first two years of the pandemic and to maintain and build on the core principles with appropriate adjustments in moving back to predominantly face-to-face delivery. The review team discussed the University's response to the pandemic with staff. They provided a positive picture of the experience of using DEAL to support their practice, highlighting the importance of the staff training which went with it, including show and tell sessions for sharing best practice, and indicating that for some DEAL had created a stronger student community. In the light of the review team's findings in relation to both the No Detriment approach and DEAL, the team **commends** 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.

2.3   Use of external reference points in quality processes

56   The University has a well-established Quality Framework which it has further refined since the QAA review in 2015. The regulations for Taught Courses include an 'awards framework' which is detailed and consistent with the FHEQ and CQFW. The Regulations for Research Degrees also include qualification descriptors for each research degree offered by the University. Processes for course validation, continuous monitoring, and course review and revalidation ensure that the courses are aligned with the expectations of the FHEQ and CQFW and that courses adhere to the relevant University regulations.

57   Staff new to teaching are supported to use national qualification frameworks in the design, delivery and assessment of programmes through the New to Teaching in HE course and a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PG Cert LTHE) programme. The latter is modelled around the UK Professional Standards Framework, enabling staff to apply for Associate Fellowship (at the end of the first module) and full Fellowship at the end of all three modules.

58   The University has engaged fully with the 2018 revision of the UK Quality Code both through academic and professional services staff being part of QAA's reading and writing groups on different aspects of the Quality Code and through undertaking a thorough review of the University's policies and procedures against the new Core and Common Practices and the Advice and Guidance themes. This review resulted in a very detailed RAG-rated action plan. With key issues in the action plan having been addressed it is now being replaced by a four-year rolling cycle desk-based review against the themes of the Quality Code to ensure continued alignment. The University's Quality Manual also evidences the University's engagement with other aspects of the external reference points including the Characteristics Statement for Degree Apprenticeships and Subject Benchmark Statements.

59   The University has in place a detailed process, overseen by QAC, through which it has mapped its standards and quality framework and associated policies and procedures against Part I of the ESG. The University intends this mapping to be reviewed and reported annually to QAC.

60   The University's approach to Welsh Language provision is set out in its Welsh Language Strategy entitled USW 2030 Vision for the Welsh Language. The strategy is

supported by activity in a number of areas: the development of curricula via engagement with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol through a Branch Officer who works closely with academic staff; the delivery of modules of at least 40 credits taught and assessed in Welsh in 10 undergraduate courses and expansion of this range of courses; the delivery of a new course from 2023 entirely in Welsh; and the provision of opportunities for staff to develop their expertise in delivering in Welsh. The University's Regulations for Taught Courses also allow for students who are studying in English to submit their assessments in Welsh (subject to specified exceptions).

61   The University has an extensive range of courses which are accredited by PSRBs and which are recorded on the University's register. The University has developed a SharePoint site through which every detail relating to each accreditation (including copies of documents) can be recorded or uploaded. University-level responsibility for maintaining the register rests with Academic Registry. Partnership Quality Sub-Committee receives a report at every meeting and QAC receives an annual report.

62   The evidence examined by the review team clearly shows the University engages with the full range of external reference points in a carefully considered and thorough manner which ensures the effective development and maintenance of its Quality Framework to meet national and European expectations for academic standards across the breadth of its provision. The review team also took account of the number of occasions on which the University has engaged with external guidance and expertise, not purely for purposes of compliance, but to enhance as far as possible its arrangements for securing academic standards, and of its willingness to engage with relevant networks to learn from, and share with, other higher education providers. Examples noted include: participating in QAA's reading and writing groups on the revised Quality Code; sharing the approach to Quality Code alignment and the continuous monitoring process with the Wales Quality Network; submitting a (successful) bid to the QAA Collaborative Enhancement Projects (in collaboration with three partner colleges); and participating in the Higher Education Investment and Recovery Fund (HEIR) working groups on PGR Training, Supervisor Training and Wellbeing. The review team **commends** 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.

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

63   The University was previously reviewed by QAA in 2015 at a time when the University had only recently been created through a process of merger. The review resulted in two areas of good practice being identified and nine recommendations. The University provided the review team with a table setting out how it had addressed each of the recommendations from the 2015 review as part of its Self-evaluative Analysis and provided appropriate evidence to support this.

64   The review team noted that the University's direction has been mapped out through its 2030 Strategy and staff have devoted, and continue to devote, considerable time and effort to aligning all aspects of the management and development of the University provision to that Strategy to ensure that it can be realised in practice. This has resulted in policies such as the Curriculum 2030 Principles, the Welsh Language Strategy, the Assessment for Learning Policy, and the Enabling Active Learning Principles and Operational Framework. This has enabled issues such as the consistency and effectiveness of assessment to be addressed further and fully developed in the light of the University's experience of responding to the pandemic and the changes in approach and delivery as a result of that. Significant changes are also evident in the introduction and ongoing development of the

risk-based approach which is designed to drive course validation, continuous monitoring and course review and revalidation.

65   The review team also noted that there has been, and continues to be, significant activity in relation to postgraduate research degree provision. In considering these documents and other supporting evidence and in meetings with staff and students, the review team explored the steps the University is taking in relation to supervisor training, and heard positive feedback about the role of the Graduate School and the PhD Manager information system as well as initiatives to support student well-being.

66   The University is focusing its approach to supervisor training by using a combination of its in-house training workshops and Epigeum's 'Supervising Doctoral Studies' online training modules. Work has also commenced on re-writing the Code of Practice for Supervisors and on mapping the code and supervisor training to UKCGE's Good Supervisory Practice Framework. The ESG mapping document also notes that supervisors will be encouraged to apply for the UKCGE Supervisor Recognition Scheme.

67   The review team also explored grade inflation with the University. Academic Board provides an annual assurance report to the Board of Governors. The University carried out a review of its institutional degree classification profile in 2020 and degree outcomes statements have since been published in July 2020 and 2021. In addressing these, the University has examined the data which showed that the University's profile of good honours degrees (First and Upper Second Class) had shown growth over this period but not to the same levels as either the UK or the sector in Wales or at the same levels as the University Alliance (the University's mission group). The data shows that the award of good honours at the University has grown from 66.4% in 2015-16 to 76% in 2019-20 compared with 73.2% and 82.1% for the UK higher education sector as a whole.

68   The University identified four reasons for its growth in good honours awards: the development of new policies relating to assessment and outcomes following the merger which created the University; improvements in weaker subject areas; improvements from students with entry qualifications other than A/AS Levels; and the No Detriment approaches introduced in response to the pandemic applicable in 2020.

69   It is evident to the review team that the University is maintaining careful and effective scrutiny of both the outcomes of its assessment processes and all aspects of those processes, with particular emphasis on addressing the impact of the pandemic and the challenges posed by academic misconduct. The University is able to demonstrate its understanding of the data and the underlying causes. Equally, it is fully focused on continuing to develop its approaches to learning, teaching and assessment to improve the outcomes for students, evidenced in policies such as the Assessment for Learning Policy and DEAL/EAL.

2.5   Approach to using data to inform decision-making and evaluation

70   The University states that data is important to achieving the goals of their current strategic plan, and this can be seen in the wide variety of data sources used to support quality processes throughout the University. Five of their seven 'Critical Success Factors' can be measured using data.

71   This data is primarily considered as part of course and faculty-level continuous monitoring processes, with releases of important data sources, such as student surveys or national data, incorporated into the self-evaluative process which results in ongoing action plans at course and faculty level. Data is also used to inform revalidation events, or decisions around the suitability of a course for perpetual validation.

72   Through the consideration of relevant data the course leader makes an initial risk assessment which is then discussed and confirmed by the Head of School. This allows an informed overall assessment of the risk to the future performance of the course to be made, and highlights which areas may require further oversight.

73   Use of data is also seen at the institutional level. The Board of Governors receives an annual report on the progress of the University against important metrics, and Academic Board receives annual papers relating to enrolment, retention, recruitment, and degree outcomes. Data is also considered through the University's Fee and Access Plan, which is also reported to the Board of Governors.

74   Access to data for staff is delivered through a range of software that is used across the University, coordinated through the central Planning and Performance Team who are also responsible for ensuring that staff are trained to use these systems. These include the use of a data visualisation software package (Power BI) which contains data on many of the University's Critical Success Factors, and benchmark data for across institutions or faculties. This service is also used to track information such as student involvement with University support services.

75   The University also makes use of a Jisc Learner Analytics system which allows personal academic coaches, course leaders and senior staff to monitor student progress. Recently, the University has also piloted a system called STEAM (Student Engagement Active Monitoring) which integrates with the Learning Analytics system to provide data such as a 'last date of engagement' with every student. Proactive alerts are sent to course leaders which can then indicate whether a student has not engaged recently and allows for early intervention, which staff involved in the pilot have found very useful.

76   Research students are primarily monitored through the PGR Manager system that was introduced in 2018. This allows for monitoring of student review dates, any outstanding tasks on the part of students and their supervisors. This data is then considered at Faculty Research Degree Committee meetings to ensure oversight of the progress of research students.

2.6   Effectiveness of how approaches to quality are used to improve and enhance learning and teaching

77   The review team saw in the evidence provided, and from staff at the review visit, that the University's risk-based approach to quality allows for courses, schools/directorates, and faculties to identify potential issues and solutions 'in-year', rather than solely making changes for the following year's cohort. For example, courses altering how teaching was being delivered in response to the pandemic to better suit students based on their feedback. There are also benefits for those courses that do not operate with a traditional academic year cycle. Actions identified as part of continuous monitoring are from sources such as the LOOP student survey system, Staff Student Liaison Committees, external examiner reports, or external partners, which illustrates their effectiveness in bringing together different feedback mechanisms into one central quality and enhancement process in order to improve learning and teaching.

78   Higher level university committees such as the Quality Assurance Committee and the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee have thorough oversight of these quality systems to ensure they are working as intended. A dialogue between both of these committees is also maintained through staff who sit on both committees which ensures that issues are appropriately managed between the two. The higher level overviews of the effectiveness of the quality systems then allow for enhancements to the operation of the

systems themselves. For example, there is ongoing work to evaluate the Student Staff Course Liaison Group engagement as part of the Institutional Audit process.

79   In addition to formal quality mechanisms for improvements to learning and teaching, the review team also heard about how relationships between students and staff allow for ongoing dialogue and feedback about the student learning experience. Students met by the review team were confident that issues they raised with teaching staff would be taken seriously, and research students were positive about the role of the Graduate School for supporting them and their interests. As well as their course team, students have a range of support available to them to enable them to achieve academically. The Personal Academic Coaching system is available for professional guidance and pastoral signposting. Another source of support is the Advice Zone, which was mentioned positively during the review visit, including by those at partner colleges, as an effective single point of access for a variety of needs and concerns.

2.7   Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards

80   The University's regulations, policies and procedures for securing the academic standards of its awards are clearly set out in its Quality Framework and its implementation is monitored thoroughly and systematically by Academic Board, Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and the Faculty Quality Assurance Committees. Detailed annual reports are provided to QAC and Academic Board which enable the Board of Governors to provide the annual Quality Assurance Statement to the Funding Council. The Quality Framework and its effective oversight apply equally to its collaborative provision delivered by partners in the UK, overseas and online, and to provision delivered by the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, which was also the subject of a positive independent external review by MusiQue (published in November 2021).

81   Meetings with staff, and the evidence provided in support of the Self-evaluative Analysis, present a clear picture of an organisation which is committed to continuing to develop its approach to all aspects of its work which relate to the setting and maintaining of academic standards, notably through systematically reviewing the impact of its policies and procedures and through developing new, and refining existing, policies. The development of the USW 2030 Strategy and policies aligned to it and its response to the pandemic, involving a careful and collaborative development of No Detriment and DEAL, the evaluations of these policies, and the learning from them to further develop them typify this view of the University.

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

82   The University has a variety of methods for self-evaluation, and many of these operate around the risk-based approach that the University has identified as its framework for implementing its quality processes. As part of the risk-based quality processes, risk-ratings are regularly reassessed which includes the involvement of teaching staff who may not have been previously involved in the detail of annual monitoring. The review team noted that some minutes from the Continuous Monitoring Enhancement Working Group referred to staff sometimes finding that different data systems have differing update times which can make it difficult to make consistent decisions as part of the continuous monitoring process.

83   Annually a series of Institutional Quality Audits are also undertaken around specific areas of work to ensure that delegated responsibility is being discharged appropriately. The areas of focus for these audits are led by the Head of Quality and Academic Services based on themes from Quality Assurance Committee meetings. For example, in the 2020-21 academic year, audits focused on the quality and consistency of course handbooks, and the availability of external examiner reports to students.

84   The University is also making use of software solutions such as Learner Analytics, PhD Manager and the student surveying platform LOOP to improve the student experience and to identify at-risk students earlier. All of these solutions mean that staff have access to data with which to make decisions, and all staff are given access to the Power BI dashboards that allow them to see important overview data.

85   Overall, the focus on using data to improve quality and involving all levels of staff in the University as well as students in self-evaluation is a core feature of the University's working practices. The University has made considerable investment in data management systems, such as PhD Manager, LOOP and Power BI, and is striving to continually improve the use of data in its student management systems. Staff met by the review team, both from the University and their partners, were positive about the value of incorporating data in the University's quality processes and felt that they were well supported to use it for this purpose. As such, the review team **commends** 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.

3 Collaborative provision

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

86   At the time of this review, the University was refocusing its approach to collaborative and international partnerships to align more closely with the overarching USW 2030 Strategy. The International Engagement and Recruitment Strategy 2018-2023 had been revised in 2021 to take account of current financial and recruitment priorities. A new USW Internationalisation 2030 Strategy had been developed and was being launched throughout the 2022-23 academic year. This was intended to prioritise four key objectives: increasing student recruitment via international partnerships; partnerships enabling collaborative research; increasing the proportion of students involved in inward and outward mobility programmes; and a more international academic curriculum.

87   In meetings with senior managers the review team was told that the University was choosing partners on a balance of civic, commercial and strategic value. In this context it had recently decided to exit from two international partnerships: the development of a campus in Dubai and a longstanding franchise of a large online provider in Cyprus. In both cases the decisions had been entirely financial rather than quality based: the returns were not considered proportionate to the complexity and administrative costs. Instead, the University expected to have fewer and more strategic partnerships, concentrating on those in the region such as the alliances with further education colleges and local health boards and the development of local degree apprenticeships.

88   Work-based learning in placements with employers in both the public and private sectors form a significant part of the University's student experience. A large proportion of the courses offered by the University are practice-focused and involve partnerships with health providers, the crime, justice and security sectors or employers in the scientific, technical and creative industries. At any one time a significant number of students are involved in some form of work-based learning. In the academic year 2021-22, 167 of the modules offered by the University included hours of work-based learning involving 2,806 students.

89   Since the introduction of the USW 2014-2020 Strategy, it is a requirement for all single honours bachelor's degrees that one of two models for employability be integrated into a course: a 20-credit employability module which allows students to access 70 hours of relevant work experience; or a fully embedded approach where a number of employability-related learning outcomes are included in required modules (usually where courses include a PSRB practice requirement). This strategic commitment to ensuring all students leave the university with employability skills was strengthened in 2022 by the adoption of a Work Placement Policy which provides additional routes to work-based learning. Placements are organised either by the Faculty Course Teams, with assistance and guidance from the University's Careers & Employability Service, or students directly source their own placement as long as the work-based learning experience meets the learning of their programme of study and facilitates the development of their graduate attributes (as defined by the University).

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

90   The University has a variety of collaborative arrangements with over 40 organisations based in the UK and overseas which are listed in the Partnership Register. 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 students were being taught off-campus by partner institutions in Wales, England or other countries outside the UK. As many of these students are part-time, their numbers amount to a lower proportion of the full-time equivalent enrolments: approximately 20%. Some 70% of students taught by partners outside the UK are studying on online courses.

91   In almost all cases, the partners deliver taught courses designed by the University under full franchise arrangements at FHEQ Levels 4 to 7. In the case of a small number of more specialised professional practice awards, such as in nursing, policing and sports coaching, the courses have been developed under joint franchise arrangements with the providing partner. In only one case does the University validate courses designed entirely by the partner: specialised online master's and diplomas in clinical medicine and healthcare management. This validated provision accounts for less than 3% of student numbers and is delivered by a partner specialising in online education for practising healthcare provision with whom the University has collaborated since 2013.

92   A substantial part of the University's collaborative provision, more than 40% of partnership student numbers, is the franchising of its undergraduate and master's courses to further education colleges in South Wales and to a lesser extent in England. In June 2022, the University re-signed its strategic alliance with five regional further education partner colleges (Bridgend College, Cardiff and Vale College, Coleg Gwent, Coleg y Cymoedd and The College Merthyr Tydfil). The alliance was established in 2013 when the University was formed and is central to its strategic commitment to create and expand opportunities for learning, employment and social inclusion in South-East Wales.

93   Since 2017 the University, in partnership with local employers and FE colleges, has built a range of degree apprenticeships for students working in the growing South Wales sectors of mechanical and electrical engineering and the semi-conductor industry as well as professional apprenticeships for national police forces developed in partnership with the College of Policing. Students studying for apprenticeship degrees now account for some 13% of all students within collaborative arrangements. The University has produced a Degree Apprenticeships Strategy which commits to providing accessible degree apprenticeship opportunities in partnership with employers supported by its schools and colleges networks and the strategic alliance. The strategy sets out the local and institutional governance structure supporting degree apprenticeships. A University Degree Apprenticeship Group has been established and each faculty has a nominated lead for degree apprenticeship provision.

3.3   Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative provision including arrangements for securing academic standards and improvement and enhancement of the student learning experience

94   The University has well established policies and administrative procedures for the management of collaborative provision which apply very similarly to all partners, whether in Wales, the UK or internationally. An annually updated Partnerships Manual provides detailed guidance on all administrative processes including approval, review and reapproval of partnerships and courses delivered, ongoing quality assurance of learning, teaching and assessment, and the mechanisms for closure of partnerships should that become necessary. These procedures for partners replicate those applied to the University's on-campus courses and are aligned with the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance on partnerships. The standard quality processes prescribed in the Quality Manual (for example continuous monitoring, course approval and review, and the use of external examiners) apply equally to collaborative provision.

The review team examined a substantial sample of documentation recording processes of approval, reapproval and validation of partners and the courses they provided leading to awards.

95   Overall responsibility for quality and standards for collaborative provision lies with Academic Board, but detailed oversight is carried out at the meetings of the Partnership Quality Sub-Committee (PQSC) reporting through the University's Quality Assurance Committee. The PQSC is supported administratively by the Quality and Academic Services team within Academic Registry. A Partner Operational Group brings together staff from both the University and partners for regular meetings to discuss and compare all aspects of the management of courses and student support. Staff from partners met by the review team gave examples of how useful they found the operational group meetings.

96   The Partnership Manual describes in detail the roles and responsibilities of all committees and staff that manage collaborative provision: particularly the partnership managers and the University and partner link officers, together with course and module leaders who are involved in the day-to-day administration and delivery of teaching. The review team met a cross-section of both University and partner staff at all levels and was able to confirm that liaison between the University and its partners is frequent, generally at least weekly, and detailed.

97   Partners are required to engage in the continuous monitoring process (see paragraphs 37 and 38). They produce and maintain rolling reports and action plans at course level which can also feed into the on-campus reports and action plans. However, during the peak of the pandemic, academic year 20/21, the standard continuous monitoring arrangements were modified, and partners were asked only to report on how they were responding to the pandemic. During academic year 2021/22, partners began returning to the standard procedures for continuous monitoring. The preferred submission method of most partners was course and module reports together with actions plans, usually in the form of a spreadsheet. Some partners were able to use the campus continuous monitoring reporting system which had been re-created for them on their own SharePoint sites by University staff.

98   By the time of the review, the standard procedures for continuous monitoring were being universally applied. Partner college staff were positive about the advantages of the process and the support and training they received from the University link officers and IT staff in developing their own SharePoint sites. The Risk Matrix was also pointed to as assisting staff in assigning risk-ratings to their courses.

99   The participation of all partners in the processes of continuous monitoring has facilitated the introduction from 2020 of two additional and related methods of alerting the University to any problems that may be arising: a risk register maintained by Quality and Academic Services and Annual Business Reviews of partners, chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor or nominee. The risk register monitors data on engagement with quality processes, adherence to academic regulations, resource issues and retention numbers. Risks requiring response are reported at each meeting of Partnership Quality Sub-Committee and actions are then put in place. Annual Business Reviews of partnerships are undertaken on a risk basis, arising from the risk register. The Annual Business Review does not replace the mainstream continuous monitoring of courses and modules but also adds information on the overall health of the partnership and its strategic importance to the University. The review team was provided with recent examples of the risk register and met staff who explained how the University had responded to the two to three partnership cases that had appeared on it. It was clear that the register together with the Annual Business Reviews provided a useful early warning system for any problems that may be developing and that, on occasion, the reviews may recommend closure and the ending of a partnership.

100   The Partnership Manual sets out detailed guidance and procedures to be applied in order to protect the interests of students when closing a partnership. As mentioned above (paragraph 87) the University had recently closed a substantial commitment to building a campus in Dubai and had in 2018 begun the process of closing a partnership with a large online provider in Cyprus that, at the time of the review, was providing over 3,500 students with franchised undergraduate and postgraduate courses of the University. In the cases of both these partners, the decisions to close were no indication of problems of standards and quality.

101   The review team was provided with detailed documentation describing all the processes involved in the closure of the Dubai campus; a procedure completed in August 2021. The information provided indicated that the closure process was carefully managed and that all affected students were able to complete their studies. In the case of the online provider based in Cyprus, the teaching out processes will continue until October 2025 when the last of the part-time students are expected to complete their studies. The review team was able not only to review the closure plan and its progress to date, but also to meet a selection of the partner's students and staff involved. The team also met University staff involved including the chair of the Exit Group overseeing the relationship. The evidence heard and seen indicated that not only was the process well managed but that the opportunity had been taken to enhance some of the student support, including feedback from students.

102   The HEFCW Triennial Quality Assurance in 2019 recommended three areas for further development in relation to collaborative provision: the need for a systematic means of ensuring that the interests of partnership students in the UK were considered by the institution and represented by the Students' Union; that the University consider how the needs of the student body overseas are met; that the governing body should maintain clear oversight of the student experience of its partnership provision. The review team therefore explored these related matters in its meetings with students and staff from the partner institutions. The meetings confirmed the University's statements in the Self-evaluative Analysis that not only was student engagement in partner institutions explicitly addressed in the continuous monitoring processes but, following a review in 2020 of student engagement with quality processes at partners, student voice mechanisms had been strengthened and students attended the University's Link Officer visits. Clear contact routes had been established for students at partners to obtain advice or support from the Students' Union and its sabbatical officers should they wish to. During 2021-22, the Students' Union had been in contact with all partners seeking nominations of student representatives from them to link directly with the Union although take-up had been low. However, partner students met by the review team, including those on wholly remote online courses, reported positive engagement through Student Staff Liaison Committees and other fora within their own institutions.

103   The collaborations with eight further education colleges, seven of which are in Wales and five in the Further Education Strategic Alliance, contributed 27% of the students studying with partners in 2021-22. They are also a significant source of recruitment onto on-campus courses, both into Level 4 and Level 6 when students come to the University to complete their degree courses. In the review team meetings with staff responsible for partnerships, both in the University and the colleges, it was apparent that, in addition to the required contact and liaison between the University and college Link Officers, there are also multiple, less formal, but well established points of contact and regular interactions at all levels of professional and academic staff.

104   In addition, the FE colleges' adoption of continuous monitoring, rather than periodic reporting, and their use of SharePoint to enter and assess ongoing data, have led to increased dialogue about performance and student progression at course and module level between colleges and University staff. College teaching staff met by the review team

confirmed that they were readily able to contact known individuals in both the University faculties and professional services. College staff frequently mentioned the Partner Operations Group meetings with University staff as an effective mechanism for raising and dealing with problems and exchanging ideas. The college partnerships were also the basis for successful joint bids for regional innovation and development funding and the development of degree apprenticeships providing progression, top-up and planned career ladders in key skills. The review team **commends** the well managed partnerships with the five Strategic Alliance further education colleges which meet the needs of local students and regional employers.

105   In conclusion, University of South Wales is a large university with nearly 30% of registered students studying for the University's awards across 40 partner institutions. The University is also distinctive for the high proportion of its students studying for vocational and professional qualifications involving work placements with partners. The University is making an effective contribution to workforce skills in Wales. Across the higher education sector, collaborative arrangements are potentially higher risk in nature because of distance and the numerous points of contact involved compared with on-campus provision. The review team has examined a large volume of documentation describing the management of partnership provision by the University and met a cross-section of students and staff from partner institutions. In the view of the review team, the evidence seen and heard indicates the standards and quality of the awards made using collaborative provision are secure and the student experience at partner institutions is good. The review team attributes these strengths to the risk-focused approach to the management of partnerships, the comprehensive and clear procedural guidance (particularly the Partnerships Manual), and the investment in sufficient staff at all levels who maintain frequent contact with their counterparts in partner providers and with employers providing work placements.