Report on the Review of Foundation Degrees in Wales, 2012-13

Contents

Introduction

1   In 2008 the Welsh Government committed to making Foundation Degrees (FDs) a fundamental element in the delivery of its skills strategy, *Skills that Work for Wales*.[1] Then in 2009 the Welsh Government's strategy and plan for higher education in Wales, *For Our Future - The 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales*,[2] set out a key role for Foundation Degrees in the delivery of the twin priorities of social justice and a buoyant economy.

2   In response, the Higher Education Council for Wales (HEFCW) published its policy on Foundation Degrees[3] in July 2010 (W10/29HE). As part of the implementation of the policy, HEFCW commissioned the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to undertake a developmental review of Foundation Degrees in Wales in 2012-13.

Aims of the review

3   The aims of the review are described in full in the *Handbook for the Review of Foundation Degrees in Wales* (the Handbook).[4] In summary, the purpose of the review was:

- to provide information about how Foundation Degrees are being developed and inform their future development
- to assess how the quality of Foundation Degree provision is being managed and enhanced
- to further involve awarding bodies, their partner colleges, employers and students in the quality assurance process.

4   As this was the first review to focus specifically on the Foundation Degree award in Wales since its introduction, it was agreed with HEFCW that the review process would be developmental. Three key features of a developmental review are that a senior member of the provider's staff becomes a member of the review team; the review report is made available to the awarding body, the partner colleges and HEFCW, but is not published; and although conclusions are drawn, and recommendations made, there were no formal judgements about the quality and standards of the provision. In adopting these features, the review aims to secure the maximum degree of openness between the team and the provider in eliciting information about their Foundation Degree provision.

Scope of the review

5   During the planning stages of the review in 2011-12, eight universities were delivering Foundation Degrees in partnership with 16 colleges. By the end of the review process in September 2013, a series of mergers had reduced the number to seven universities and 11 colleges. Annex 1 provides a list of providers as they were at the time of review and after merger.

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[1] Welsh Assembly Government (2008) *Skills that Work for Wales*, available at: wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/skillsthatforwales/?lang=en
[2] Welsh Assembly Government (2009) *For Our Future - The 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales,* available at: wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/forourfuture/?lang=en
[3] Available at: www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2010/w10%2029he%20foundation%20degrees%20circ%20and%20annex%20a.pdf
[4] QAA (2012) *Handbook for the Review of Foundation Degrees in Wales*, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/FD-Wales-handbook.aspx

6   Although colleges may have worked with more than one university to deliver Foundation Degrees, for the purposes of the review, each college was linked to one university so that it would only be actively involved in one review. The number of colleges involved in each review ranged from none to three. Details are provided in Annex 1.

7   To avoid repetition and recognising the importance of both partners in the delivery of the qualification, the universities (the 'lead institutions') and their partner college(s) will be referred to in this report as the '(name of university) partnership'. The term 'provider' is used generically to refer to universities or colleges.

The review method

8   The review methodology is described in full in the Handbook: *Handbook for the Review of Foundation Degrees in Wales*.

9   The key reference point for the method was the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). In common with the majority of QAA methods, the key areas of 'academic standards', 'quality of learning opportunities', 'enhancement' and 'information about the learning opportunities' were considered. A fifth area 'design and development' was added to encompass the particular characteristics of Foundation Degrees as described in the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* (FDQB):[5] employer involvement; accessibility; articulation and progression; flexibility; and partnership. Providers were deemed to have 'met' or 'not met' their responsibilities under each of these five key areas. Good practice was identified and recommendations for improvement were made.

10   In order to achieve depth as well as breadth, review teams selected a programme trail (or trails, depending on the size of the partnership's provision) to provide a means of investigating the management of systems and procedures in greater detail. The selection of trails was also influenced by the need to gain a representative sample of curriculum areas, modes of study, new/established programmes, and funding streams across the provision.

11   The formal consultation on the method was conducted in May 2012 and the Handbook was published in August 2012. A briefing for the providers took place in July that year, followed by training for reviewers in October. Twelve external reviewers were selected: two with Foundation Degree Forward (*fdf*) experience; two with a higher education in further education background; two from institutions who were participating in the review; two Welsh speakers and four student reviewers. The size of review team and length of review were adapted to the size and complexity of provision, and the reviews were managed by four experienced review coordinators.

12   The eight reviews were conducted between February and June 2013. The method involved meetings with staff and students at the lead institution and selected partner colleges, meetings with employers, and visits to at least one site of work-based learning. A list of sites of work-based learning visited by the teams is provided as Annex 2.

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[5] QAA (2010) *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Foundation-Degree-qualification-benchmark-May-2010.aspx

Feedback on the method

13   Providers, review coordinators and teams were asked to evaluate the review process. Of the 31 responses received at the time of publication of this report, all felt that the review had achieved its purpose 'completely' or 'to a large extent'. Providers commented positively on the conduct of the review and the team. Negative comments related to the overall length of the review process and the demands for information, which some providers regarded as disproportionate to the size of the provision. Conversely, review teams commented that the information provided could have been more carefully selected and signposted. Providers were ambivalent about the duration of the review visits, which some regarded as excessive, while simultaneously acknowledging that a lengthier schedule had enabled the teams to involve all their designated partner colleges and to corroborate evidence across the partnership. There were some logistical problems in transporting reviewers to more remote locations, but review teams found that meeting employers in the workplace was invaluable in understanding the delivery of Foundation Degree programmes. Two providers commented on the need for the more effective management of bilingual meetings.

Student data (see Annex 3)

14   The data used in this report is provided by HEFCW and is verified up to 2011-12, the year in which the reviews started.

15   The data (Table 1) shows that the total number of enrolments on Foundation Degree programmes has continued on an upward trend, rising from 2,961 to 3,008 in 2011-12, an increase of two per cent from the previous year, and by more than five-and-a-half times in the 10 years since the first intake.

16   The number of full-time enrolments has declined by 15 per cent from 2010-11 to 2011-12, but increased by six times over the 10-year period. The number of part-time student enrolments has risen by 21 per cent on the previous year and by five times since 2002-03.

17   The largest providers continue to be the University of Glamorgan and Glyndŵr University (Table 2), which between them account for 45 per cent of Foundation Degree enrolments in 2011-12, although this share has reduced from 57 per cent in 2011-12. The University of Wales, Trinity Saint David saw the largest increase from four per cent to 11 per cent over the same period. The Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI) scheme supports 16 per cent of the total enrolments in 2012-11, divided between the University of Glamorgan and the University of Wales Newport, an increase of 77 per cent on the previous year.

18   As at September 2013, One Wales funding (Table 3) supports 17 programmes in 16 further education institutions (FEIs), a decline on the previous year from 23 programmes. As at September 2013, European Social Fund (ESF) funding (Table 4) supports 14 programmes at seven FEIs involving 664 students and 311 employers. These figures show a decline since January 2012 when there were 12 programmes at 10 FEIs with a total of 902 students and 519 employers.

19   The pattern of recruitment in the 12 subject areas (Table 5) shows an increase of 36 per cent in enrolments in 'Subjects allied to medicine' and 'Architecture, building and planning'. There is a 21 per cent increase in 'Engineering and Technology' and a 16 per cent increase in 'Agriculture and related subjects'. The most significant decline is in 'Physical sciences' (78 per cent) and 'Social studies' (21 per cent). All other subject areas remain relatively stable.

Summary of findings

20   Overall, the eight providers were found to have met the requirements under each of the five areas. A total of 37 features of good practice were identified and 65 recommendations for improvement were made.

Findings

21   The findings are reported under the five key areas. As there were only eight reviews, this overview report is able to achieve a level of detail which extends to the identification of specific programmes. On the advice of the Quality Assessment and Enhancement Sub-Group to HEFCW's Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee, where specific good practice has been identified, it has been attributed to the relevant partnership in order to facilitate dissemination and encourage sharing. All other references have been anonymised, in accordance with the decision not to publish individual reports.

Design and development

Involvement with employers

22   The review found that, where appropriate, the design of Foundation Degrees takes account of the requirements of a wide range of Sector Skills Councils, professional and vocational bodies, and National Occupational Standards. Land-based programmes at Aberystwyth are linked to Lantra and the FdEng Plant Maintenance and Operations at the Glyndŵr partnership was approved by Semta. The FdSc Healthcare Practice programme was developed by Grŵp Llandrillo Menai in partnership with the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and the Glamorgan partnership programme specifications identify external reference points such as the requirements of the Royal Aeronautical Society. The FdSc Construction Management and Technology programme at the Trinity Saint David partnership has acquired professional recognition from the Chartered Institute of Building and the Cardiff Metropolitan partnership ensures that the FD Dental Technology programme meets all the competency requirements of the General Dental Council. The Newport partnership makes use of input from the Care Council for Wales on its FD Care programmes and also has an agreement with Celtic Manor Hotel to manage a golf scholarship programme.

23   There is a high level of engagement with employers in the design and development of programmes across the provision, although some operate within more explicit frameworks than others. The Glyndŵr partnership is found to be responsive in engaging dynamically with a wide range of regional and national employers. The establishment of a steering group and employer forum by the Swansea partnership to promote the active involvement of employers in the ongoing development of the FD Engineering programme is highlighted. The Advanced Practical Skills Module, developed by Aberystwyth in response to feedback from employers, is good practice and enables Foundation Degree students to gain professional accreditation of practical skills. Innovative good practice is identified on the FdSc Dental Technology programme offered by the Cardiff Metropolitan partnership, which works with a large number of national employers to deliver the programme by distance learning to very positive feedback from students and employers. There are also some examples of effective support for employers, such as the 'Guidance for the Development of Foundation Degrees' devised by the Glamorgan partnership.

24   The Trinity Saint David partnership is commended for enabling the contribution of employers to the validation and review of Foundation Degree provision. However, employer involvement in the validation, delivery, assessment and review of programmes across the

sector is generally less evident and forms the subject of eight recommendations. Three partnerships are encouraged to take steps to accommodate employers who have expressed a wish to become more involved in the design, development and delivery of Foundation Degrees. Two partnerships are urged to formalise employer involvement in the validation process and a further two to engage employers more systematically in the review of programmes. Another recommendation, while recognising the contribution of employers to the assessment process, urges a second partnership to formalise the process to enable employers to engage consistently in a discussion with tutors prior to the determination of marks in order to minimise the variation in interpretation.

Accessibility

25   Foundation Degrees typically make a significant contribution to widening access by recruiting students from a wide variety of backgrounds, ages and experience.

26   UHOVI funding provides the clearest example of the Welsh Government's commitment to meeting the needs of industry and improving job prospects for those living in the Heads of the Valleys region, and supports the delivery of a wide range of Foundation Degree programmes through the Newport and Glamorgan partnerships. The review found the scheme to be coherent and responsive to the needs of students, offering flexible delivery modes and study patterns. Effective use is made by the partnerships of the market research and intelligence provided by UHOVI to meet the needs of employers by supporting their ongoing involvement in the development of Foundation Degrees.

27   The benefits of expanding Foundation Degree provision must, however, be delivered within certain financial constraints. Low student enrolments are recorded on a number of programmes and, notwithstanding the need to allow new programmes time to become established, this raises questions about the viability of some provision. A shortage of work-based learning opportunities was also identified in some curriculum areas and, taken together, these two issues give rise to a recommendation to review provision where recent or rapid expansion may affect the sustainability of some programmes.

28   Among the more specific examples of good practice in widening access is the fully bilingual FdA Early Childhood and Learning Support Studies programme offered by the Bangor partnership, which widens access for predominantly Welsh speakers, as well as those who have limited Welsh language skills but aspire to roles in which the language is used regularly. Bilingual teaching and learning is enhanced by the co-location of the School of Education, which delivers the award with the Economic and Social Research Council-funded Bilingualism Research Centre.

Articulation and progression

29   All programmes provide appropriately articulated progression to higher level qualifications and students are generally well informed about employment opportunities through close partnership links with employers. The advice and guidance provided to students on progression to higher levels of study provided by the Glyndŵr partnership is commended. However, there are instances across the provision where students perceive that information about progression is not communicated effectively to them by the partnerships and recommendations for improvement have been made. Further details and recommendations about the provision of information can be found in paragraph 71.

30   Across the provision there is some variability in the use of accreditation of prior experiential/certificated learning (APE/CL). The single recommendation refers to the accessibility of information provided to students about the partnership's APE/CL process and more detail can be found in paragraph 71.

31   The availability and use of data on progression is variable at the level of the individual partnership. Where data is provided there are considerable variations in completion rates for students between programmes delivered by the same partnership. A recommendation is made to one partnership to formalise the process of recording and reviewing information on progression with a view to improving programme planning and management.

32   From the data available (Tables 6a and 6b), of those students who started and completed in 2011-12, 62 per cent successfully completed the course, but this does not include part-time continuing students. From those students who completed the 2011 Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, 66 per cent have continued in either full or part-time study (Table 7).

Flexibility

33   Across the provision, programmes are offered through a range of modes of delivery including full-time, part-time and distance and e-learning. In addition to the general flexibility offered by the UHOVI scheme, there are numerous instances of flexible timetabling to accommodate students' work patterns and domestic responsibilities, for example, in the evenings and at weekends. Two examples of good practice are the structure and delivery pattern of the FD in Engineering offered by the Swansea partnership, which facilitates the effective integration of classroom and workplace learning for students and employers; and the FD Care Studies and FD Childhood Studies at the Trinity Saint David partnership, where students are given the opportunity to attend on alternate days.

Partnership

34   There is a wide range of external links, from the Welsh Government and the Funding Council to the Sector Skills Councils, professional associations and employers.

35   Links with partner colleges are good and are articulated in collaborative strategies or governed by formal partnership agreements which underpin the development of the provision. The collegial and proactive relationship which promotes the successful delivery of Foundation Degree programmes at the Newport partnership is cited as good practice.

36   Links with employers are highly effective. Formal links are evidenced through university/college/employer advisory boards in some partnerships which serve to develop subject networks. The productive relationship between teaching staff and employers, many of whom are former students, is recognised as good practice at Aberystwyth and ensures that student skills are matched to industry needs. Two related examples of good practice are identified at the Swansea partnership. The University recognises that by working with the expertise and experience of its college partners, it can more effectively engage with local industry. The vision and leadership of the FD Engineering Project Director in facilitating inter-organisational arrangements for employers, students and other stakeholders and the open days run for FD Engineering students, employers and industrial mentors to develop collaborative work-based learning opportunities are both commended.

Academic standards

37   The review found that all partnerships met their responsibilities for maintaining the academic standards of the Foundation Degree qualification.

38   There are clear reporting structures and a variety of good practice which contributes to the maintenance of standards: the Trinity Saint David partnership fosters close working relationships between the colleges, schools and faculties which strengthens the management of academic standards; the 'Gateway/Gatekeeper' system at the Glamorgan partnership facilitates the comprehensive monitoring and reporting process; and the role of moderators, appointed by the lead institution to support the programme teams in setting and maintaining standards, is a feature of good practice at the Cardiff Metropolitan partnership.

39   Two recommendations are made in relation to the maintenance of academic standards. In one case, although the lead institution disseminates information to partner colleges, one partnership is advised to clarify whether university or college procedures should be applied in certain situations in order to eliminate confusion among staff. Another partnership receives a similar recommendation with regard to complaints and appeals procedures, and is encouraged to ensure that the regulations are disseminated to students.

40   The *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* (FDQB) is generally well understood and appropriately applied to the design and development of programmes. However, there are two recommendations to ensure that partner college staff working on Foundation Degree programmes are fully aware of the relevant sections of the Quality Code, and two other recommendations refer to the need to further map and embed elements of the Quality Code in the validation, monitoring and review processes. As a consequence to this, one of the partnerships is also advised to develop the annual monitoring process to ensure that it provides specific oversight of academic standards in Foundation Degrees.

41   External examining processes are satisfactory, but there are also a number of recommendations for improvement. A lack of external examiner awareness of the FDQB is noted in two partnerships, followed by recommendations that external examiner reports should more explicitly state how the expectations of the FDQB are met. In two other partnerships it is noted that external examiner reports cover all provision within the particular subject discipline delivered by the university and/or the partner colleges, and do not disaggregate information to individual programmes. It is therefore recommended that external examiners are encouraged to comment on individual programmes so that each provider is aware of its strengths and weaknesses. Two further partnerships are advised that external examiner reports should be made available to students to increase their involvement in the quality assurance process.

42   Systems exist in all partnerships, allied to the annual monitoring process, which enable the lead institutions to validate, monitor and review the quality of their own Foundation Degree provision and that offered by the partner colleges. The range of activities undertaken by the Newport partnership at a strategic and operational level to secure parity of standards across six partner colleges, which include clearly delineated responsibilities, a comprehensive portfolio of quality assurance procedures, and thorough validation, monitoring and review processes is highlighted as good practice.

43   With regard to assessment, a limited number of comments were made by students about the need to ensure that feedback on assignments is timely, but students were generally satisfied with the assessment process. An example of innovative good practice is identified at the Glyndŵr partnership where the virtual learning environment (VLE) is used interactively on the FdA The Learning and Development of Babies and Young Children to

provide a dynamic and comprehensive overview of feedback to individual students from all tutors, and to capture student responses to the feedback.

44   In one partnership, although students' understanding of plagiarism and its consequences is confirmed, a recommendation is made to embed plagiarism detection software and to check assignments routinely for originality.

Quality of learning opportunities

45   The review found that all partnerships meet their responsibilities for the quality of learning opportunities.

46   The same deliberative structures for maintaining academic standards within the partnerships are broadly accountable for assuring the quality of learning opportunities. Partner colleges are responsible for the day-to-day management of Foundation Degrees, but the university may chair validation panels, and programmes are typically subject to the same annual monitoring processes as all other university provision. Overall, the review finds these processes to be effective. However, attention is drawn to the need for one partnership to consider ways of providing a full induction and ongoing support for the Foundation Degree programme leaders from the partner colleges and the university's academic links in order to understand their roles and responsibilities, and to address the variability in the extent to which they engage proactively with teams at the partner colleges.

47   The quality of work-based learning is fundamental to the success of the Foundation Degree award and a range of positive practice is identified. The Trinity Saint David and Glyndŵr partnerships are commended for the extensive and challenging opportunities provided in the workplace, which enhance the students' learning experience, notably on the FdSc Animal Science and FdEng Aeronautical Engineering programmes respectively. Where there is a lack of viable work placement opportunities, efforts are made to provide suitable alternatives. The Glamorgan partnership offers significant work-related projects on the Creative Industries programmes, delivered in partnership with employers and underpinned by industry mentors, which is identified as good practice. Other partnerships offer simulated vocational activities which enable students to demonstrate the required learning outcomes, for example the FdA Digital Media and Television Production programme delivered by the Bangor partnership.

48   While the review recognised a variety of good practice in work-based learning, the most frequently formulated recommendation, which pertains to five of the partnerships, highlights the need to develop clear policies and procedures on work-based and placement learning to ensure that students are offered a comparable experience within each provider, and that staff, students and employers are clear about their roles and responsibilities.

Support

49   Support for students, many of whom are part-time, mature and have domestic responsibilities, is challenging for providers across the UK higher education sector. Students were broadly positive about the support available on their Foundation Degree programmes and four examples of good practice are identified: the excellent range and positive impact of academic and personal support offered by the Glyndŵr partnership; the extensive individual academic and pastoral support provided for students at the Cardiff Metropolitan partnership; the proactive role of the moderators in providing both informal and formal support, particularly for students progressing to honours-level study, also at the Cardiff Metropolitan partnership; and the responsiveness of the FD Engineering project team and partner college staff in addressing issues raised by students at the Swansea partnership.

50   Although individual personal support is generally effective, there are three wider recommendations relating to the need to improve student representation systems. A fourth, and more specific recommendation, advises the partnership to revise the arrangements for providing study skills support so that students receive appropriate guidance before they are required to complete summative assessment tasks.

Staff development

51   Students from all partnerships commented positively on the quality of teaching and learning, and the knowledge and expertise of tutors, many of whom are also practising professionals.

52   A wide and appropriate range of staff development activity is offered to support student learning. Good practice is found principally in those areas where staff at the partner colleges are able to benefit from the facilities offered at the lead institution, or where guidance is effectively disseminated. The system of lead tutor roles developed by the Bangor partnership to share robust practice in the work placement and skills modules common across the Foundation Degrees delivered by Grŵp Llandrillo Menai provides an example of the latter approach.

53   Support for scholarly activity is an ongoing issue for further education providers of higher education across the sector in the UK and the extent and diversity of responses is reflected in the actions undertaken by the partnerships. Glyndŵr University is commended for the support provided for its partner college staff who are undertaking higher level qualifications and scholarly activity. A wide range of bespoke staff development is delivered to partner college staff through the Centre for Learning, Teaching and Assessment. The University has also been proactive in the development of two modules relating to the delivery of higher education in further education and aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework. Similarly, the opportunities for continuous professional development available to all Foundation Degree staff within the Newport partnership are also highlighted as good practice. The Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching operates as a hub for sharing good practice, and a high level of staff engagement in training is evident in that over 30 staff have completed, or are in the process of completing, a higher level qualification.

54   In contrast, two recommendations focus on the need for improvement in this area. One encourages the lead institution to work with its partners to ensure that staff engage more fully with the opportunities offered for development and scholarly activity, and to monitor the effectiveness of these activities. Another describes the staff development programme for partner college staff delivering Foundation Degrees as 'embryonic' and urges improvement.

Learning resources

55   The review found that overall the learning resources provided were sufficient and appropriate for the Foundation Degree programmes delivered.

56   Where explicitly investigated, the allocation of resources is found to take place as part of the wider annual planning process and is typically part of the individual course validation and approval processes. External examiner and student feedback on learning resources are generally sought as part of programme monitoring and review.

57   Students are broadly satisfied with the learning resources provided, but there is considerable variation, firstly in student responses between the partnerships and secondly in response to different types of resource. Many Foundation Degrees require specialist resources and there is evidence of excellent provision through a combination of provider and workplace

which receives high praise from students. Examples include the up-to-date equipment on the FDs in Aeronautical Engineering and Creative Technology and Digital Media at the Glyndŵr partnership; the extensive resources available on the FdSc Process Operations and Maintenance offered by the Trinity Saint David partnership; and the access to 'state-of-the-art' instruments through a manufacturer's academy based at Merthyr Tydfil College on the FD Creative Industries Music Technology programme delivered by the Glamorgan partnership.

58   Library resources were generally found to be adequate, with partner college students having access to university libraries. However, physical resources formed the subject of recommendations aimed at two partnerships, namely expanding the specialist library resources and supporting the partner colleges' efforts to improve the learning spaces and resources for Foundation Degree students.

59   Access to online resources is more variable. The majority of students were very positive about the quality and availability of online resources provided by the partner colleges and lead institutions in support of their learning. Some issues with access were identified in a small number of partnerships, for example, licensing restrictions which prevented one partner college's staff accessing learning materials through the lead institution's virtual learning environment. The most significant issue identified was the inaccessibility of a shared folder on one partner college's network, which inhibited part-time students' ability to study off campus, and resulted in a recommendation that teaching and learning materials were made readily available online.

Enhancement

60   The review found that all partnerships meet their responsibilities for enhancing the quality of the provision.

61   For the purposes of QAA review, 'enhancement' is defined as the deliberate steps taken at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities. Appropriate strategies for enhancement were identified and, at their most effective, are typically embedded in teaching and learning strategies, deployed through appropriate committee structures and reviewed through the annual monitoring process. Partnership enhancement strategies are at different stages of implementation. Where they are less well embedded, this is attributed to the recency of some mergers. The assessment of the impact of some enhancement activities is also affected by the newness of some of the Foundation Degree programmes.

62   Although not defined as 'good practice', a number of activities are identified which demonstrate the partnerships' commitment to enhancing provision. The Cardiff Metropolitan partnership enhances its Foundation Degree programmes through discussion with consultative boards, such as the FE2HE Consortium and the Stakeholder Forum. Aberystwyth University has a strategic alliance with Bangor University which uses joint projects to draw on good practice, and disseminate the outcomes to the Foundation Degree programmes. The Bangor partnership's approach to enhancement also involves the initiation of one or more major projects each year at the University, for example on Welsh medium delivery and on assessment. At the partner college, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, there is a systematic, but separate, approach to continuous improvement, which is under review following merger. Since the majority of Foundation Degrees have only been in place for one or two years, there is limited information available to inform strategic quality enhancement. However, the University and the partner college are planning to develop a quality enhancement strategy for Foundation Degree programmes across the partnership.

63   The Trinity Saint David partnership provides an illustration of how a provider is maintaining its commitment to an enhancement strategy during merger. Having recorded examples of enhancement activity which took place prior to the merger, the transformed university is in the process of completing its Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy, which contains elements that will impinge directly on Foundation Degree provision, such as developing flexible forms of delivery and the enhancement of activities relating to collaborative provision.

64   The Glamorgan partnership is adapting its enhancement strategy to the newness of many of its programmes by compiling a good practice survey which serves as the basis for enhancing provision. One example of particular relevance to Foundation Degree programmes is the use of grants under the Innovation in Learning and Teaching Scheme, which provide staff with the opportunity to undertake placements in the manufacturing and service industries. Another is the work of the Engineering Industry Forum which is particularly active in engaging employers' contributions to the enhancement of courses and is identified as a feature of good practice by the review.

65   Three specific examples which indicate the diverse range of good practice in enhancement across the provision are identified. Among a number of enhancement activities, the Glyndŵr partnership's process for programme commissioning considers programmes on an annual basis against a range of key performance indicators and enables the enhancement of learning opportunities through the introduction of new, sustainable and demand-led Foundation Degrees. The Swansea partnership's use of employer surveys has resulted in the more proactive engagement of employers with staff and students, and a greater employer contribution to the programme through the Foundation Degree Engineering Steering Group. Finally, the Newport partnership has established a generic quality enhancement theme across the provision, which becomes part of quality monitoring and evaluation reports for each programme, and provides evidence of the alignment of university and partner college quality enhancement procedures.

Information about Foundation Degree provision

66   The review found that all partnerships meet their responsibilities for providing information about Foundation Degree provision which is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

67   The provision of accurate and accessible information about programmes of study is important to students, and systems exist across the provision for ensuring the quality and consistency of information which are at least satisfactory. In all cases, the university has overall responsibility for the information published about the Foundation Degree awards it confers. This responsibility is delegated to the partner colleges allowing varying degrees of autonomy in the development of information about its provision, and the marketing of programmes. Appropriate checking mechanisms are in place, although a number of recommendations for improving the provision of information are made.

68   A range of information is produced about Foundation Degrees, including core documents such as programme handbooks and prospectuses, and required data such as the Key Information Sets (KIS). Some information is provided in print form but the majority is web-based.

69   Arrangements between the lead institutions and partner colleges for checking the accuracy and completeness of information include the course approval, monitoring and review processes. For partner colleges with a greater degree of devolved responsibility for programme information, appropriate guidance is provided by the lead institution.

70   Where it is required, guidance is provided by the lead institutions for the publication of information in Welsh. The Glyndŵr partnership sets out its commitment to communicating in Welsh in its Welsh Language Scheme 2012, and the Bangor partnership provides its information to students in both English and Welsh.

71   Owing to the relatively mechanistic nature of the processes involved in producing information about higher education provision, examples of good practice tend to be rarer in this area across all review methods. However, two examples merited attention, one relating to the process and another to a more specific example of the information produced. The rigorous and well-understood mechanisms for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information at Aberystwyth, and the Work Based Learning Mentoring Handbook which describes the roles of students, mentors and employers provided by the Swansea University partnership, were both identified as good practice.

72   Recommendations for the improvement of the information provided were more numerous. Few issues relate specifically to print-based information, but there is some variability in the accessibility and quality of information about Foundation Degrees for applicants provided on partnerships' websites. Four recommendations refer to accuracy: one relates to the need to fully embed the system for checking the consistency and currency of all information and three more refer to the need to strengthen the mechanisms for checking the accuracy of information in programme handbooks. The remaining recommendations are generally concerned with the accessibility of information. Two refer to the need to make information available to employers in a timely way and another advises the partnership to make KIS data for Foundation Degree programmes available on the website. Five recommendations are more specifically related to the clarity of the information provided to students: one refers to the need to make the defining characteristics of Foundation Degrees clearer to students in all relevant information; three advise the partnerships to improve the clarity of information available to students about progression routes; and one refers to making information about APE/CL arrangements clearer.

Conclusions

73   The review has served its purpose in examining a representative cross-section of Foundation Degree programmes from the perspectives of lead institution, partner college, student and employer, and in drawing out some clear good practice and areas for improvement, in addition to providing a commentary on the general development of the provision.

74   Enrolments onto Foundation Degree programmes show a steady increase since 2002-03, supported by UHOVI, One Wales and ESF funding. Data on progression from Foundation Degrees is not sufficiently comprehensive to draw firm conclusions about the destinations of students. However, the provision under review is clearly valued by students and employers and effectively managed by the lead institutions and partner colleges.

75   The provision is designed and developed in accordance with the requirements of the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* (FDQB) and the partnerships meet their responsibilities for the management of academic standards, quality of learning opportunities, enhancement, and information about Foundation Degree provision.

76   The engagement with Sector Skills Councils and employers in the design and initial development of programmes is generally strong, but the formal involvement of employers in the validation, delivery and assessment is less evident and worthy of further exploration, given that progress in this area is being made by some partnerships. Employers could be made more fully aware of the characteristics of Foundation Degrees which may encourage them to become more involved. Lead institutions work effectively with partner colleges to

deliver programmes which are flexible, accessible and appropriately articulated to higher level study, although the findings suggest that more extensive use might be made of APE/CL in student recruitment, and a more systematic recording of progression data may help to address the issue that some students are not sufficiently aware of progression opportunities.

77   Academic standards are maintained through the deliberative structures of the lead institutions and their partners, but in the best cases these are supplemented by link roles operating between the lead institution and the partner college(s), which facilitate the awareness of standards and quality, and enable the sharing of good practice. There is a need to increase general awareness of the Quality Code among some staff and familiarity with the FDQB among some external examiners.

78   The quality of learning opportunities is sustained through some excellent teaching, which, in the best cases, is supported by access to professional development activity delivered by the universities' centres for teaching and learning; although there is scope for more involvement of staff in university-based continuing professional development. Some work-based learning benefits from high quality resources in the workplace and innovative practice developed in conjunction with employers. Where placements are not available, partnerships have generally provided appropriate alternatives to meet the learning outcomes. In a number of partnerships there is a clear need for a work-based learning policy to ensure greater consistency for students and employers, and reinforce the good practice. Some restricted access to learning resources exists in relation to the availability of online information for part-time students.

79   Clear enhancement strategies exist in the majority of partnerships which extend to partner college provision. Where strategies are not 'joined up', this is partially explained by merger transitions and by the relative newness of some programmes, both of which have contributed to a lack of time for strategies to be assimilated and evaluated.

80   Information about the provision is satisfactory and there are some good individual examples of guidance for students and employers, but more attention could be given to ensuring that employers are conversant with the characteristics of the Foundation Degree award and that programme information is clear and accessible for students, particularly on progression opportunities.

81   There are no significant differences in the quality of the learning experience between full and part-time students, with the exception of access to online learning resources in a limited number of cases.

82   The UHOVI scheme provides an effective model for the planning and development of Foundation Degrees which are responsive to local issues and engage employers, and encourage growth. However, the large number of programmes developed by some partnerships and the comparative recency of their introduction, combined with the low numbers on some programmes and the lack of some work placement opportunities raise issues of sustainability.

83   There are clear benefits which can be derived from the review in disseminating the good practice identified to other providers. Much of what has been identified as good practice is not dependent on funding or the size of the partnership, or the numbers of students enrolled on the Foundation Degree programmes, but on effective collaboration between lead institutions, partner colleges and employers. Three major themes have been identified which will enable the good practice to be appreciated in context and are pertinent to the characteristics of the Foundation Degree and the circumstances in which it is delivered:

- engagement with partners
- engagement with employers
- widening access and support for students.

84   The dissemination of good practice is one of the principal recommendations from the review; the remaining recommendations are provided below.

Recommendations

85   Some of the recommendations assigned to partnerships are applicable only to them. Some have the potential to be addressed as mergers are completed, and policies and procedures are consolidated. Where individual recommendations are particularly significant or recurrent, they have been collated and broader recommendations generated.

86   The following recommendations are for consideration by the partnerships and the funding agencies.

- Disseminate the good practice. In addition to the Future Directions event, the partnerships may wish to consider other forms of dissemination such as a network for staff involved in the delivery of Foundation Degrees.
- Explore the ways in which employers can become more involved in the cycle of programme development.
- Develop clear work-based learning policies to ensure comparability of experience for students and appropriate guidance for employers.
- Provide targeted staff development for staff involved in the development and delivery of Foundation Degrees and external examiners on aspects of the Quality Code, particularly the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*.
- Further exploit opportunities for staff development within the partnerships, to enable partner college staff to benefit from higher education oriented activity.
- Improve the coherence of enhancement strategies across some lead institutions partner college(s).
- Review and improve the clarity and accessibility of some information to students and employers, for example on progression and APE/CL.
- Make more systematic use of progression data to monitor the effectiveness of programmes across the provision.
- Review new programmes with low enrolments for viability and sustainability within the next two years.
- Consider the most appropriate mechanisms for sustaining the future growth of Foundation Degrees.

References

QAA (2012) *Handbook for the Review of Foundation Degrees in Wales*, available at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/FD-Wales-handbook.aspx

David Parry (2012) *Foundation Degrees in Wales: The Story So Far,* available at:
www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/nations/wales/Foundation_Degrees_the_story_so_far_Report_English_Final.pdf

QAA (2010) *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, available at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Foundation-Degree-qualification-benchmark-May-2010.aspx

Review reports (unpublished)

Data from the internal report of the review evaluations, Research, Intelligence and Enquiry Unit, QAA (August 2013)

HEFCW/HESA data

Annex 1 - The review partnerships

Lead institution	Colleges linked with this institution for the purposes of review
Bangor University	Coleg Llandrillo & Coleg Menai (now merged to form Grŵp Llandrillo Menai)
Swansea University	Gower College Swansea
Cardiff Metropolitan University	Cardiff and Vale College
University of Glamorgan (*now merged with the University of Wales, Newport to form the University of South Wales)	Merthyr Tydfil College Coleg Morgannwg and Ystrad Mynach College (now merged to form Coleg y Cymoedd)
University of Wales, Newport*	Coleg Gwent Bridgend College
Aberystwyth University	
Glyndŵr University	Yale College and Deeside College (now merged to form Coleg Cambria) Coleg Powys (now merged with Neath Port Talbot College* to form Grŵp NPTC)
University of Wales, Trinity Saint David	Neath Port Talbot College* Coleg Sir Gâr Pembrokeshire College

Annex 2 - Visits to sites of work-based learning

Lead institution	Employer visited
Aberystwyth University	- Derwen International Stud - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Bangor University	- Bryn y Neuadd, Llanfairfechan - Tir Na Nog Playscheme
Cardiff Metropolitan University	Craft in the Bay Gallery, Cardiff
Glyndŵr University	- Airbus - Ruthin Day Nursery - Borras Park Infants School
Swansea University	Dŵr Cymru (Welsh Water)
University of Wales, Newport (now University of South Wales)	- Coychurch Primary School, Bridgend - Torfaen Community Resource Trust, Pontypool
University of Glamorgan (now University of South Wales)	- GE Aircraft Engines, Nantgarw - Ynyscynon Early Years Centre, Tonypandy - Theatr Soar
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	- Folly Farm, Pembrokeshire - Manor House Wild Life Park, Pembrokeshire - Special Needs Activity Centre (SNAC), Taibach

Annex 3 - The student data

Table 1: Enrolments on foundation degrees between 2002-03 and 2011-12

Academic year	Full-time/Sandwich Students		Part-time Students		Total enrolments on FDs	% increase for the year
	Enrolments on FDs	UHOVI FD enrolments	Enrolments on FDs	UHOVI FD enrolments		
2002/2003	191	0	278	0	469	
2003/2004	248	0	374	0	622	33
2004/2005	408	0	622	0	1,030	66
2005/2006	484	0	822	0	1,306	27
2006/2007	693	0	950	0	1,643	23
2007/2008	1,047	0	1,029	0	2,076	23
2008/2009	1,157	0	1,147	0	2,304	11
2009/2010	1,489	59	1,230	13	2,791	21
2010/2011	1,411	186	1,297	67	2,961	6
2011/2012	1,050	305	1,471	182	3,008	2

Source: HEFCW

Table 2a: Enrolments on foundation degrees by awarding institution in 2010-11

Institution	Region	FD enrolments: 2010/2011			%
		Full-time/sandwich	Part-time	Total	
University of Glamorgan	South East	692	178	870	29
Aberystwyth University	North & Mid	70	4	74	2
Bangor University	North & Mid	26	56	82	3
Cardiff University	South East	0	0	0	0
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	South West	0	109	109	4
Swansea University	South West	0	0	0	0
Cardiff Metropolitan University	South East	141	49	190	6
University of Wales Newport	South East	85	141	226	8
Glyndŵr University	North & Mid	397	425	822	28
Swansea Metropolitan University	South West	0	87	87	3
The Open University in Wales		0	248	248	8
Sub-total		[1411]	[1297]	[2708]	
UHOVI scheme					
University of Glamorgan	South East	173	52	225	8
University of Wales Newport	South East	13	15	28	1
Sub-total		[186]	[67]	[253]	
Total		1597	1364	2961	100

Source: HEFCW

Table 2b: Enrolments on foundation degrees by awarding institution in 2011-12

Institution	Region	FD enrolments: 2011/2012			%
		Full-time/sandwich	Part-time	Total	
University of Glamorgan	South East	475	179	654	22
Aberystwyth University	North & Mid	76	9	85	3
Bangor University	North & Mid	26	36	62	2
Cardiff University	South East	0	0	0	0
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	South West	54	271	325	11
Swansea University	South West	0	0	0	0
Cardiff Metropolitan University	South East	13	91	104	3
University of Wales Newport	South East	115	131	246	8
Glyndŵr University	North & Mid	264	436	700	23
Swansea Metropolitan University	South West	27	70	97	3
The Open University in Wales		0	248	248	8
Sub-total		[1050]	[1471]	[2521]	
UHOVI scheme					
University of Glamorgan	South East	238	128	366	12
University of Wales Newport	South East	67	54	121	4
Sub-total		[305]	[182]	[487]	
Total		1355	1653	3008	100

Source: HEFCW

Table 3: Foundation degree provision funded by One Wales funding

	Funded by One Wales as at Jan 2012	Funded by One Wales as at Sept 2013
South East Wales Region		
Programmes funded	6	5
Lead HEIs	3	2
FEIs involved in provision of FDs	7	7
North and Mid Wales Region Cadarn		
Programmes funded	7	5
Lead HEIs	4	4
FEIs involved in provision of FDs	6	5
South West Wales Region		
Programmes funded	10	7
Lead HEIs	3	2
FEIs involved in provision of FDs	4	4

Table 4: Foundation degree provision funded by the ESF

	Funded by ESF as at Jan 2012	Funded by ESF as at Sept 2013
Foundation degree programmes	12	14
Awarding bodies involved	8	7
Further education institutions involved	10	7
Geographical distribution*		
Pan Wales projects	5	4
North Wales	1	2
South East Wales	2	3
South West Wales	1	2
UHOVI	2	2
West Wales	1	1
Participants/students	902	664
Employers	519	311

Table 5: Enrolments on foundation degrees by subject area in 2011-12 (FTE students)

Subject area	FD enrolments: 2010/2011	FD enrolments: 2011/12			% of 11/12 cohort
	Total	Full-time/sandwich	Part-time	Total	
Subjects allied to medicine	97	0	131.5	131.5	4
Biological sciences	302	247	55	301.5	10
Agriculture and related subjects	169	133	63	196	7
Physical sciences	65	12	2	14	0
Computer science	142	78	89	167	6
Engineering and technology	293	131	223	354	12
Architecture, building & planning	112	35	117	152	5
Social studies	701	336	217	553	18
Law		27	2.5	29.5	1
Business and administrative studies	304	118	173.5	291.5	10
Mass communications & documentation and Languages	109	84	13	97	3
Creative arts and design	156	127	27	154	5
Education	512	27	540	567	19
Total		1355	1653	3,008	100

Source: HEFCW

Table 6: Students registered and obtaining foundation degrees in 2011-12

	Mode		Total
	Full-time/Sandwich	Part-time	
Students registered	530	431	961
Students obtaining a foundation degree	381	213	594

Table 7: Students on the DLHE11 who obtained a foundation degree**

Mode of Occupation			
	Mode		
Title	Full-time/ Sandwich	Part-time	Total
Full-time work	33	65	98
Part-time work	12	11	23
Primarily in work and also studying	10	71	81
Primarily studying and also in work	41	18	59
Full-time study	87	0	87
Part-time study	*	3	+
Due to start work	*	0	+
Unemployed	12	2	14
Other	5	4	9
Total	403	174	377

Notes:
** These students are the selection of students who obtained a foundation degree in 2011-12 and completed the DLHE survey
Cells with values less than 5 have been expressed as *
Cells with values greater than 4 that would enable identification of the * figure have been expressed as +