



Institutional review

University of Wales

October 2010

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Abbreviations used in this report

AB	Academic Board
AAIs	Accredited and Affiliated Institutions
ACCR	Annual College and Course Review
BAC	British Accreditation Council
CAFRD	Common Academic Framework for Research Degrees
CC	Collaborative Centre
CQFW	<i>Credit and qualifications framework for Wales</i>
CV	Curriculum vitae
FHEQ	<i>The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland</i>
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HEIs	Higher education institutions
NSS	National Student Survey
PSRB	Professional, statutory and regulatory body
QAA	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QAEC	Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee
QSB	Quality and Standards Board
RDB	Research Degrees Board
TDB	Taught Degrees Board
UWASF	University of Wales Alliance Student Forum
VU	Validation Unit
VUQH	Validation Unit Quality Handbook
VLE	Virtual learning environment

Introduction

A team of reviewers visited the University of Wales to carry out an Institutional review in October 2010. QAA conducted a preliminary visit to the institution in February 2010 to discuss operational aspects of the review. QAA received the self-evaluation document in June 2010.

On 22-24 September 2010, the review team visited the University to explore - with the Vice-Chancellor, senior members of staff and student representatives - matters about the management of quality and standards raised by the self-evaluation document or other documentation provided for the team. During this briefing visit the team signalled a number of themes for the review visit and developed a programme of meetings, which was agreed with the institution.

The review visit took place on 18-22 October 2010. The review team was:

Dr Chris Alder
Professor John Baldock
Dr Anne Miller
Ms Jenny Rice
Mr Thomas Phillips
Mr Tony Platt (Review Secretary)

The review was coordinated by Mr Alan Hunt, Assistant Director in the Reviews Group. To arrive at its conclusions, the review team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision.

Summary of review findings

A review team appointed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carried out an Institutional review of the University of Wales (the University) in October 2010. The review checked how effectively the University's procedures:

- establish and maintain the standards of its academic awards
- maintain the quality of learning opportunities in the programmes of study that lead to those awards
- secure the reliability of published information.

Judgements

The review team's investigations led it to take the following view of the University:

- confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards
- confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Features of good practice

The review team noted the following features of good practice:

- reciprocal memberships of committees and working groups across the University and the Alliance institutions (paragraph 1.4)
- the common academic framework for postgraduate research provision (paragraphs 1.8-1.9)
- the effective use of Joint Boards of Studies in collaborative centres (paragraph 4.13).

Recommendations

Advisable actions

The review team advises the University to:

- make explicit in all service-level agreements the University's responsibility, as the awarding institution, for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 1.5)
- review award certificates for Accredited and Affiliated Institutions to provide unambiguous identification of the University as the awarding institution (paragraph 1.6)
- expedite the development and introduction of the proposed common academic framework for taught programmes, taking full account of the *Code of practice* (paragraph 1.10)
- strengthen the University's oversight of the quality of learning opportunities in Accredited and Affiliated Institutions, with particular reference to the reporting mechanisms for annual monitoring (paragraphs 3.1-3.2)
- establish arrangements for all students registered on taught programmes to make academic appeals to the University as the awarding institution (paragraph 3.4)

- begin immediately a programme of reviews, using the new vetting process, of its existing Collaborative Centres (paragraph 4.3)
- ensure that the recently introduced external examining arrangements for collaborative provision are implemented in a timely and effective way, and that the roles of overseas external examiners are clearly specified and understood (paragraphs 4.5-4.7)
- review the external examiner's report form to ensure that it explicitly identifies *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and the *Credit and qualifications framework for Wales* as essential frames of reference (paragraph 4.8).

Desirable actions

The review team would like to see the University:

- make external examiners' reports available systematically to student representatives (paragraph 3.3)
- establish a minimum entitlement to support and development provision for staff in collaborative partner institutions (paragraph 4.11)
- consider carefully the sustainability of the current resources for support of collaborative provision, in the light of future growth (paragraphs 3.8; 4.12)
- take deliberate steps to ensure that collaborative centres are complying with the requirement to provide training for postgraduate research students, taking account of the *Code of practice, Section 1* (paragraph 6.9).

Review findings

1 Academic management framework

1.1 The University's Council oversees its strategic direction. Responsibility for academic matters lies with the Academic Board (AB). Both Council and AB draw membership from a range of interests including representatives of students and Accredited and Affiliated Institutions (AAs). Representatives of Affiliated Institutions attend AB as observers. With effect from the academic year 2010-11 the AB has three primary committees: the Taught Degrees Board (TDB), the Research Degrees Board (RDB) and the Quality and Standards Board (QSB). The University's organisational structure reflects the fact that it is primarily an awarding institution. It has recently created a Faculty to strengthen its collaborative activity (see paragraph 3.4).

Relationships with other institutions (AAs and CCs)

1.2 Separate but recently converging arrangements apply to the management of academic standards and quality of the University's large, complex and diverse provision at AAs and Collaborative Centres (CCs). The review team sought to establish whether the various relationships and arrangements were clear, and whether the University had the capacity to manage properly the standards and quality of its awards.

1.3 The University of Wales has evolving relationships with its AAs in Wales, with which it has formed the University of Wales Alliance (see Annex A). Through what it calls the 'devolved model' it assigns operational responsibility for the academic standards of its awards, and the quality of schemes of study leading to its awards, to those institutions that have degree awarding powers. Interim arrangements had been made for those institutions yet to gain full degree awarding powers. The University's relationships with AAs are governed by service-level agreements.

1.4 Under the terms of the devolved model, academic standards and quality are managed through the individual AAs' policies and processes, which have been approved by the University of Wales AB. The AAs also submit to AB an annual report which includes summaries of significant issues raised by external examiners and actions taken in response, data on student progress and achievement, and a statement of the institution's engagement with external reference points. Senior University staff are members of the key quality committees (the 'quality fora') of each AA, and representatives of these institutions sit on the equivalent University committees and on AB, and also a range of working groups. The review team considered that these reciprocal memberships of committees and other groups, particularly Thematic Groups, were a feature of **good practice**, because they provided opportunities for cross-institutional working, supported developments for enhancement and promoted the spread of good practice.

1.5 Senior staff of the University confirmed to the review team that, in the devolved model, responsibility for standards and quality lies with the University of Wales as the awarding institution. However, the team found that service-level agreements with AAs did not state this position explicitly, and staff of the University and AAs did not always describe clearly the location of responsibility for standards and quality of awards. Because of these inconsistencies the team **advises** the University to make explicit in all service-level agreements its own responsibility for academic standards and quality as the awarding institution.

1.6 The review team notes that the student submission reported that students in AAs are commonly unaware of the University and believe themselves to be acquiring their

degrees from the institution they have attended. The team also found that the identity of the awarding institution was not represented clearly on degree certificates for AAls. The crests and titles of the institution of study and the University of Wales were equally prominent on these certificates, and the text did not state that the University was the awarding body. Consequently, the team considered it **advisable** that the University review award certificates for AAls to provide unambiguous identification of itself as the awarding institution.

1.7 Management of taught programmes at CCs is overseen by AB and its committees and administered by the Validation Unit (VU). Policies, regulations and procedures are set out in a comprehensive and regularly updated Validation Unit Quality Handbook (VUQH). These validated programmes are monitored through the process of Annual College and Course Review (ACCR) and quinquennial reviews, which are reported to the University's AB through its committees. The review team found that arrangements for collaborative provision, as set out in the VUQH, were clearly defined, appropriately aligned with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*), published by QAA, and understood by those required to implement them.

Common academic frameworks

1.8 All University of Wales research degrees delivered at AAls or CCs are governed by a recently introduced Common Academic Framework for Research Degrees (CAFRD), which is overseen by the Research Degrees Board. Participating AAls and CCs are also subject to a process of periodic review. For research students registered at seceding institutions (see Annex A) there are separate annual reporting requirements. All research activity reporting is monitored by the RDB.

1.9 The review team concluded that the CAFRD provided a robust and clear mechanism for ensuring quality and parity of research degree provision across a wide range of different institutions, and provided a high degree of University oversight. The team saw evidence of the recent periodic reviews of research degree provision, which included inspection visits to all participating institutions. On this basis the CAFRD was considered to be an example of **good practice**. However, much of the framework now available to the RDB for the management of quality and standards is new, and many of the goals that the new Board has set itself were still to be achieved at the time of the review visit. It is important that the RDB pursues its new agenda in a timely and considered manner.

1.10 The University has recently considered a proposal to develop a common academic framework for taught programmes. Noting the benefits derived from the introduction of the CAFRD, the review team **advises** the University to expedite the development and introduction of the proposed framework for taught programmes, taking full account of the *Code of practice*, to obtain similar advantages and strengthen its oversight of taught awards at AAls.

Conclusion

1.11 Overall, the review team found that the University had a sound framework for its arrangements for academic management, but it draws particular attention to the recommendations made (see Summary of review findings) with reference to the matters noted in this section (particularly paragraphs 1.5, 1.6. and 1.10).

2 Academic standards

2.1 At AAls, the following functions are devolved to the institutions themselves and follow their own quality assurance processes: arrangements for the approval, monitoring and

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review of their programmes and awards; assessment policies and regulations; external examining arrangements (see paragraph 1.4). CCs follow the VU's quality assurance processes and procedures. The University oversees all its awards through the TDB, RDB, QSB and AB.

2.2 Academic standards at AAls are monitored through the annual report process (see paragraph 1.4). All CCs report on standards and quality through ACCRs, which include external examiners' reports and summaries of actions taken in response to them. At CCs, Joint Boards of Studies are required for all validated schemes; representatives of the University and the centres, including student representatives, sit on these Boards, which consider all aspects of standards and quality. Their minutes are appended to ACCRs, which are sent to the TDB and the RDB, which in turn report to AB.

2.3 AAls are required to provide an annual statement on their engagement with external reference points, most importantly the Academic Infrastructure and the PSRB frameworks. CCs are required to show evidence of reference to the Academic Infrastructure, including subject benchmark statements when submitting new course proposals and by assessors when approving new developments. A validation submission requires completion of programme specifications using the University's standard template; this made reference to subject benchmark statements, but not to *The framework for higher education qualifications* (FHEQ) or the *Credit and qualifications framework for Wales* (CQFW). The University's external examiners' report form also omitted reference to the FHEQ and CQFW (see paragraph 4.8). However, in general the University's use of external reference points in assuring academic standards has been appropriate.

Assessment

2.4 AAls operating under the devolved model use their own assessment policies and regulations, which are submitted annually to AB as part of the annual report. For CCs, the University provides regulations and requirements for assessment to which all must adhere. Guidance is given in the VUQH. Assessment regulations and requirements for schemes of study are approved through initial validation and published in student handbooks. Examination papers and coursework briefs are approved by external examiners prior to use. Student work is marked at CCs and moderated in accordance with University guidelines, and the review team heard positive comments from students about assessment feedback. The team concluded that the University's arrangements for assessment in CCs met the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 6*.

2.5 Examining Boards for CCs are attended by the external examiners, the University moderator, a VU officer and internal examiners. Boards are chaired by a senior member of staff at the partner institution and conducted in accordance with an agenda provided by the University. External examiners and the moderator make reports which are considered by the Joint Boards of Studies as part of the ACCR.

External examining

2.6 Under the devolved model, AAls' external examining arrangements operate according to their own quality assurance processes and procedures, which have been approved by AB. As part of the annual report (see paragraph 1.4) AAls submit annual summaries of their external examiners' reports and their actions in response to issues. The review team considered that these reports, though varied in scope and level of detail, fulfilled their purpose adequately. They are considered by the University's QSB with a view to highlighting examples of good practice and issues of concern at the level of the institution.

If there are matters of concern, the chair of QSB writes to the institution for further information and reports the action to AB.

2.7 External examining in CCs is discussed in paragraphs 4.5-4.8 below.

Management information

2.8 The University does not yet have a management information strategy, but at the time of the review it was developing one. In the devolved model, AAls collect data through their management information systems, and the University requires annual reporting of this data. CCs hold full data profiles for their students and send information on degree results by subject to the University. Student performance statistics are considered by the TDB and AB. The lack of a management information strategy and a sophisticated student record system limits the effective use of management information by the University, and the University should consider making more effective use of management data to inform strategic planning and development.

Conclusion

2.9 The review team concluded that confidence can be placed in the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards. The team draws the University's particular attention to the recommendations made (see Summary of review findings), with reference to the matters noted in this section (particularly paragraphs 2.3 and 2.8).

3 Quality of learning opportunities

3.1 AAls have responsibility, under the devolved model, for all aspects of the quality of learning opportunities for taught programmes leading to University awards. This includes approval, monitoring and review of programmes, student feedback and representation, academic and personal guidance and support, and staff appointment and support. Annual reports from AAls to the University (see paragraph 1.4) say little about the outcomes of validation and review activity; the use of student feedback and representation; or the quality of the learning experience of students. University officers who attend the quality fora of AAls make oral reports at AB's subcommittees, but written reports of outcomes from monitoring and review of learning opportunities are not provided. AB does not receive reports of PSRB accreditation visits relating to its awards in AAls.

3.2 The review team considered that, in general, the University relies heavily on the fact that the AAls had degree awarding powers and were themselves subject to QAA Institutional review. It concluded that, given the extent of devolved powers and the relatively limited oversight by AB and its committees, the University should more fully assure itself about the quality of learning opportunities leading to its awards at AAls, and **advises** it to strengthen its oversight of what is offered by AAls in its name. The team also noted that the proposed development of a common academic framework for taught provision (see paragraph 1.10) could provide a basis for enhanced oversight of both standards and quality at AAls. Accordingly, the team **advises** the University to expedite the development of this framework.

3.3 At CCs the quality of learning opportunities is considered at validation and monitored annually through the ACCR process and by University-appointed moderators, and is subject to quinquennial review. These processes cover learning resources and academic and personal support and guidance for students, and the review team found that they worked appropriately according to the University's requirements in the VUQH. The University's collaborative provision includes a number of distance learning programmes.

The VUQH includes specific requirements for their quality assurance; a working group, supported by a moderator champion (see paragraph 4.10), has been set up to address any concerns and promote good practice.

The University Faculty

3.4 The University has recently created its own Faculty headed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning, Teaching and Enhancement). It comprises three schools, each with a dean supported by a number of senior lecturers. Their primary roles will be to support CCs by acting as moderators, participating in initial validation and reviews and providing staff development. Additionally, they are required to have expertise in the University's recently defined seven strategic languages for collaborative provision (see paragraph 4.4). The review team considered these appointments to be a positive development, but considered it **desirable** that the University keep under review the adequacy of its current resources for support of collaborative provision, in the light of future growth.

3.5 CCs' appraisal processes are considered at the time of validation. ACCRs include reports on staffing issues such as appraisal, mentoring and peer review. At quinquennial review, consideration is given to staffing provision, criteria for appointments and all CVs.

Student feedback and representation

3.6 The establishment of the University of Wales Alliance Student Forum (UWASF) which includes AAls' Students' Union officers, has created a common forum for students and coordinates student representation on University committees. Student representatives are included in the membership of Council, AB and all relevant committees. UWASF also has a direct institutional-level reporting line through a standing agenda item at AB. UWASF is supported by the recently appointed student liaison officers with responsibility for promoting student representation and student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement.

3.7 Through membership of University committees (see paragraph 1.1), student representatives see annual summaries of external examiners' reports from AAls, though not the original reports. The review team also found that student access to external examiners' reports at CCs was variable, and considered it **desirable** that the University should share external examiners' reports with all student representatives.

Appeals

3.8 The review team found that AAI students on taught programmes leading to University awards could not appeal to the University as their awarding institution. Moreover, AAI students met by the team did not know whether they could appeal to the University. Noting that the University's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) had mapped the appeals and complaints procedure for CCs against the *Code of practice, Section 5*, the team **advises** the University to revisit this section of the *Code of practice* (particularly precept 3) and establish arrangements for all students registered on taught programmes, including those at AAls, to make academic appeals to the University as the awarding institution.

Conclusion

3.9 The review team concluded that confidence can be placed in the University's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. The team draws the University's particular attention to the matters noted in

paragraph 3.1, and the recommendations made in paragraphs 3.2, 3.7 and 3.8 for strengthening the oversight of its awards in AAls.

4 Collaborative arrangements

4.1 The University has extensive collaborative provision, covering a wide range of disciplines taught in a number of languages apart from English and Welsh. At the time of this review there were about 120 CCs in 29 countries, including the UK. In 2009-10, there were 28,161 registered students in CCs (13,704 in overseas CCs). From 2010-11, collaborative provision is overseen by the TDB and managed by the VU, which publishes regulations, requirements and guidance for CCs in the VUQH.

4.2 The University has recently improved its arrangements for the management of collaborative provision, in response to the Risk Review that it commissioned in 2008 (see Annex A, paragraph x), its Strategic Plan, and recommendations made in QAA audits of overseas provision. The review team was able to confirm that all but three of the 32 recommendations in the Risk Review had been, or were being, acted upon. The team noted particularly the strengthening of policy and procedures for the approval of collaborative partners and progress in considering the equivalence of academic standards of awards. Three recommendations had not been followed; instead, the University had sought to address the issues through alternative actions. These are discussed in the sections on external examining (paragraphs 4.5-4.8), and research degrees in CCs (paragraphs 6.2-6.3).

Selecting and approving Collaborative Centres

4.3 The review team found that many organisations approach the University to seek a collaborative relationship, and the review team learned that most of these approaches are declined after initial investigation. The University does not seek out potential partners on a strategic basis. Following the Risk Review, the University has added further strategic policies and criteria for the selection and approval of CCs: it has strengthened its initial 'vetting' process; it requires that relevant prospective centres have British Accreditation Council (BAC) or equivalent accreditation; and henceforth it will approve collaborative provision only in English, Welsh or its newly established list of seven strategic languages (see paragraph 4.4). The review team learned that the strengthened vetting procedures would be applied henceforth to all new potential partners. However, in addition, the team **advises** the University to begin immediately a programme of reviews, using the new vetting process, of its existing CCs.

Strategic languages of provision

4.4 The review team found that, from 2010-11 onwards, the University would only validate programmes delivered in seven languages defined as strategic, and that both external examiners would be fluent in the relevant language of each programme. Faculty appointments also required possession of appropriate skills in strategic languages. The University intended to withdraw in a planned manner from programmes operating in other languages and has informed all relevant overseas CCs, in writing, about termination of such programmes as a result of this policy decision. However, the team found evidence that not all CCs which would be affected had become aware of the consequence of this decision, and **advises** the University to ensure systematically that its policy is understood and implemented universally (see also paragraph 4.6). It should also consider the implications of this policy for issues such as the assessment of local workplace-based learning, for example in clinical settings, where local languages are used.

External examining in collaborative provision

4.5 The Risk Review report recommended that the University should appoint external examiners only from UK higher education institutions (HEIs). The present review team found that the University has not adopted this recommendation, but has sought to address the issue by changing its requirements for appointment of external examiners for overseas provision. The University's External Examiner Code of Practice in the VUQH for 2010-11 states that for non-UK provision 'it will be normal practice for both a UK-based and a locally based External Examiner to be appointed'. Where overseas programmes are not delivered in Welsh or English, both external examiners must be fluent in the language of delivery. The review team was told that local external examiners advise the University on local issues and requirements that may be relevant to the successful running of the programmes. While the University's External Examiner Code of Practice did not include regulations on this, the review team was assured that local external examiners overseas did not judge comparability with UK standards: only UK-based external examiners were required to do this. The team found that the external examiner's report form specifies the exclusive role of the UK external examiner in making judgements about comparability of standards (see also paragraph 4.8).

4.6 The review team found that some CCs were unaware of recent changes in the University's requirements for external examining of overseas provision. There was evidence of some uncertainty about requirements for the number and provenance of external examiners and the need for fluency in the language of tuition. There was similar uncertainty regarding changes made to the external examiner report template so that only the UK external examiner should answer the questions about comparability of standards with UK frames of reference.

4.7 The review team concluded that the University had made some improvements in the security of its external examining arrangements for overseas collaborative provision. However, the team **advises** the University, as a matter of priority, to ensure that the recently introduced external examining arrangements for collaborative provision are implemented in a timely and effective way, and that the roles of overseas external examiners are clearly specified and understood.

4.8 The external examiner report form did not specify in sufficient detail the UK standards and frameworks to which UK external examiners must refer in making judgements about academic standards. The review team **advises** the University to review this report form and ensure that it explicitly identifies *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the *Credit and qualifications framework for Wales* (CQFW) as essential frames of reference for external examiners in making judgements about academic standards.

Moderators

4.9 While collaborative provision is operationally independent of awards made through AAls, it has hitherto depended largely on academic expertise within AAls for the provision of moderators and external experts for reviews and other purposes. The University has responded to this high level of dependence by appointing its own Faculty (see paragraph 3.4).

4.10 The review team found that moderators from, or appointed by, the University monitored and supported collaborative provision effectively. They normally visit each CC twice a year (with additional visits in case of validations and quinquennial reviews) and make written reports to the VU and TDB. Examples of reports seen by the team, while variable in their levels of detail, showed they were being made as required and included reporting of

actions taken in response to issues raised through the monitoring process. The team sought to establish whether moderators were appropriately developed and supported in their multifaceted role, and found that some moderators had a considerable workload, with responsibility for up to ten CCs; moreover, moderators expressed concerns about the scope of CCs' expectations of them. Moderator allocations had been reviewed recently to limit their workload, and the team was told that the highest moderator workloads would be carried from now on by members of the University Faculty. Significant progress has been made towards an online moderators' handbook, and moderator champions have been appointed (see also paragraph 5.3). Notwithstanding these welcome developments, given the other responsibilities of faculty members and the pivotal nature of the moderator role, the team considered that the University should keep individual moderator workloads under review, and especially consider the support provided for a new moderator appointed to a newly validated CC.

4.11 Moderators also have an important role in providing support and development for staff at CCs, where they act as 'critical friends'. The review team found that the nature and extent of staff development provided relies largely on the moderator's judgement, and considered it **desirable** that the University establish a minimum entitlement to support and development provision for staff in CCs.

Monitoring of collaborative provision

4.12 The review team saw a sample of documentation relating to collaborative provision. It noted a considerable variation of style in completing reports such as ACCRs, and found that steps were being taken to develop more consistent approaches, including the recent addition of ACCR guidance notes and a template to the VUQH. The team also found examples of issues (such as securing standards of assessment at master's level, and ensuring that external examiners approved assessment tasks and that moderators met students as intended) which the University had become aware of through its monitoring procedures and had addressed appropriately. While noting this as evidence of effective monitoring and responsive action, the team concluded that in some areas the University should consider more proactive approaches (for example, on assessment standards, ensuring that relevant CC staff understand the FHEQ), and should assess the sustainability of the current resources for support of collaborative provision, in the light of future growth.

Joint Boards of Studies

4.13 Joint Boards of Studies play a key role in CCs by providing a forum where those with responsibility for programmes, and student representatives, can meet. These Boards formally respond to a wide range of inputs, from external examiner reports through curriculum changes to consideration of student views. They have a central role in annual monitoring, and their minutes are appended to ACCRs which are sent to VU and TDB. Notwithstanding some observed variability in practice, the review team considered that the effective use of Joint Boards of Studies in CCs was effective and a feature of **good practice**.

Conclusion

4.14 The review team found that the University had made improvements to its regulations and requirements for collaborative provision. It considered that some areas of potential risk to standards and quality remained, and draws the University's urgent attention to the matters noted in this section, and to the recommendations made.

5 Management of quality enhancement

5.1 The University's strategy for enhancement is expressed in the University of Wales Strategic Plan 2010-14 and is further elaborated in the Management Strategy for Quality and Standards of University of Wales Awards. It includes strategic goals for the management of learning, teaching and assessment. Reflecting the particular nature of the University (programmes are not delivered directly but by AAls and CCs), the focal points for enhancement are: developing the learning resources available to students; improving the student experience; and strengthening the governance structure used by the University to monitor and manage the delivery of its degree programmes by its partners.

5.2 Responsibility for learning resources and their enhancement in AAls is devolved to the institutions. The University exercises oversight and developmental roles through the work of two groups formed under the auspices of the Alliance: the Alliance Thematic Group on Academic Quality and the Alliance Thematic Group on Learning and Teaching. The Alliance Thematic Group on Academic Quality helps staff involved in quality management within the Alliance to discuss matters of mutual interest and develop shared enhancement activities. The Alliance Thematic Group on Learning and Teaching provides a forum for developing joint enhancement initiatives, focusing particularly on the student experience and developing student skills. The University of Wales Alliance Student Forum and the appointment of student liaison officers are part of the strategic focus on enhancing the student experience in Wales.

5.3 The provision of learning resources in CCs is the delegated responsibility of the CCs themselves, while the encouragement of enhancement initiatives and the monitoring of learning resources and the student experience are central functions of moderators, who work with staff and students at CCs to ensure they derive maximum benefit from the learning resources provided by the University. The University holds annual conferences for academic staff, moderators, administrators and students to meet and discuss shared interests and concerns. Moderator champions have been appointed to support moderators and to develop policy and provision in a range of areas including learning resources and student engagement.

5.4 The team noted that the approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities is necessarily different from that found in more conventional campus-based universities. The University had, at the time of the review, only recently emerged from a period when its governance and constitution underwent substantial changes, as did organisational arrangements for the management of quality and standards. Its approach also has to take account of the fact that it does not deliver programmes of study directly but through a large number of partners. Enhancement is therefore dependent upon support and agreement from members of AAls and CCs.

5.5 The range of initiatives designed to enhance the student experience, particularly in the CCs (such as the online library, the Global Campus, the University of Wales Conferences, moderator champions, and Teaching Fellowship Awards) were at early stages of development at the time of the review.

Conclusion

5.6 The review team found that the University was investing in the development of an imaginative range of initiatives that it uses to work with partners in order to develop learning resources and to enhance the student experience.

6 Arrangements for postgraduate research students

6.1 From September 2010 the University had put in place the CAFRD for the management of research programmes leading to University of Wales awards (see paragraphs 1.8-1.9). The RDB oversees all postgraduate research programmes and the CAFRD requires a similarly constituted Research Degree Committee to manage research programmes in each AAI and the seven CCs where research degrees are delivered.

Research at Collaborative Centres

6.2 The University responded to the Risk Review's recommendation (see Annex A, paragraph x) that it should withdraw research degree provision at its CCs by pointing out that the establishment of the RDB, the CAFRD and the University's common Code of Practice would provide it with mechanisms to monitor and improve provision in the CCs, using a framework which would apply to them and to AAIs. The appointment of faculty staff (paragraph 3.4) and the University's recent inspection visits to the CCs were evidence that the University was exercising its increased capacity for oversight.

6.3 The RDB responded to the overview of visits to the CCs which had provided the University with a detailed understanding of the deficiencies in provision. The University has accepted 11 recommendations designed to ensure compliance with the University's own requirements and those of the wider academic frameworks in Wales and the UK. Some of these recommendations have been met through the introduction of the CAFRD and the University's common Code of Practice. The CAFRD has been judged by the review team to be an example of good practice (see paragraph 1.9). However, much of the framework now available to the RDB for the management of quality and standards is very new, and many of the goals that the new board has set itself were still to be achieved at the time of the review visit. It is important that the RDB pursues its new agenda with energy and care.

Research environments

6.4 The provision of a supportive research environment is the responsibility of the AAIs and participating CCs. At the time of this review the University was developing a range of cross-institutional initiatives for further support of research activity. The Strategic Plan recognises that the members of the Alliance are not research-led institutions but that they contain pockets of research excellence in defined areas upon which they and the University will seek to build. Among its objectives, and those of the Alliance agreement, is the creation of an inter-institutional research community within Wales, particularly between the members of the University of Wales Alliance. There is significant collaboration in some areas such as Art and Design and Welsh Language Studies.

6.5 The periodic reviews of research programmes in the AAIs conducted in early 2010 demonstrated that they contained supportive research environments and some developing research cultures. In the cases of the seven CCs providing research programmes, the inspection visits arranged by the RDB indicated that, while individual support was appropriate, broader institutional research environments were lacking.

6.6 The University was investing significantly in supporting its research objectives: for example, the financing of seven research chairs in Welsh universities including the five members of the Alliance; the creation of a Virtual Graduate School; the development of skills courses for supervisors and students; the development of the Prince of Wales Innovation Scholarships programme; and the Prince of Wales Visiting Innovators programme. One of the Alliance Thematic Groups focuses on collaboration to support research activity,

particularly the winning of grants. The online library subscribed to databases and journals likely to be useful to research students, particularly in the CCs.

Management of research provision

6.7 Selection, admission and induction processes are the responsibilities of the AAls, who themselves determine criteria for admission under the University's common Code of Practice. For CCs, the University provides a detailed 'protocol' of approved qualifications. All applications for research degree registration are seen and approved by the University moderator and reported for confirmation by RDB before admission takes place. Where CCs seek to admit students with qualifications outside the protocol, a decision is made by AB or its nominee.

6.8 The University's own reviews had generated a significant range of recommendations for each partner, including: the establishment of formal induction programmes in every institution; comprehensive requirements for induction and the provision of information (specified in detail in the University's common Code of Practice); and future compliance, by all providers, with the Code's requirement for a supervisory team of at least two, led by a Director of Studies approved by and registered with the University. This last initiative has resulted in a register of approved supervisors.

6.9 Other recommendations included the development of a University-wide programme of skills development, which was taking place among the AAls at the time of the review. Some CCs had developed their own programmes. The review team considered it **desirable** the University should take deliberate steps to ensure that CCs are complying with the requirement to provide training for postgraduate research students, taking account of the *Code of practice, Section 1*. The University's common Code of Practice requires all research students to be helped in drawing up personal development plans appropriate to their areas of study and any relevant professional activities.

6.10 While systems for gathering feedback were generally limited, the enhancement of mechanisms for feedback did not feature in the RDB's action plan nor in the recommendations following the periodic reviews. Given the geographic dispersion of its research students, this is an area that the RDB might consider addressing more systematically.

Conclusion

6.11 Overall, the review team found that the University has a sound framework for its arrangements for postgraduate research and that the research environment and postgraduate research experience meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1*.

7 Published information

7.1 Responsibility for providing information to students and other stakeholders on programmes leading to University awards provided by AAls lies entirely with the institutions themselves. Until recently, the University had only held information on the final award made to the student, but now holds data on student admission, progression, achievement and the final award made to the student.

7.2 The Student Submission, compiled in part from a small sample of students at Alliance institutions, reported that in Wales students are commonly unaware of the University and believe themselves to be acquiring the degree from the institution they have attended. The University had recently put in place a number of measures to make information

available to these students including the appointment of student liaison officers who had made contact with students' unions and visited the universities; attendance by University staff at freshers' fairs and open days at Alliance institutions; a comprehensive 'My Wales' website and links to this from AAls.

7.3 All statements, advertisements and other promotional material prepared by CCs must be approved by the University before publication. The University provides detailed written guidance on the production and approval of publicity material, which is contained within the VUQH. Specialist staff in the VU monitor the websites of CCs and use web alert systems to discover any unauthorised, inaccurate or inappropriate publicity or public information. Where the guidelines are breached, the University has the authority under the validation agreements to withdraw validation as a last resort. The University was aware that it faced distinct risks in this area but believed that it had the capacity and powers necessary to respond when inaccurate information was issued by CCs. In the view of the review team, it is important that the University continues to ensure that the resources it devotes to this role are commensurate with the scale of the task and the risks involved.

7.4 The review team found that the information published by the University in both hard copy and on its website is substantial, comprehensive and accessible. Relative to its size the University devotes substantial resources to ensuring that published material is up to date and consistent. The University has a published Welsh Language Scheme and complies with the Welsh Language Act 1993, making an annual report to the Welsh Language Board. From the published information that it sampled, and from what it heard from students, the review team found that, overall, the information published in various formats by the University is accurate, comprehensive and reliable.

Glossary

Standard terms used by QAA

academic standard - A level of achievement achieved by a student, that can be measured against relevant criteria.

academic quality - A measure of how learning opportunities are managed to help students to achieve their awards.

advisable - Describing an action that, in QAA's opinion, would make an important contribution towards maintaining the standards and/or quality.

benchmark statements - Subject benchmark statements set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject.

collaborative provision - Educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit toward an award, of an awarding institution delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation.

desirable - Describing an action that, in QAA's opinion, would make a positive contribution to standards and/or quality.

distance learning programmes - Programmes where students learn at a place convenient to them, supported by remote access to resources via the internet, telephone networks, printed documentation or other transmissible material.

enhancement - A process of taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities.

good practice - This term is used formally to endorse and highlight certain aspects of practice that impressed the review team.

moderator - Examiner or assessor who compares marks against an external benchmark or standard and adjusts them if necessary.

threshold standard - The minimum standard that must be achieved for a student to qualify for an award.

Terms specific to the University of Wales

Accredited Institutions - Institutions in Wales with degree awarding powers that offer programmes of study leading to awards by the University (defined by the University as where the University is the awarding body for at least one third of the students).

Affiliated Institutions - Institutions in Wales with degree awarding powers that normally offer their own awards but may offer a limited range of programmes of study leading to awards by the University (defined by the University as where the University is the awarding body for some, but less than one third, of the students).

Collaborative Centres (CCs) - Institutions that provide taught and/or research provision validated by the University and leading to its awards.

devolved model - The University's system for assigning operational responsibility for academic standards and quality to institutions with degree awarding powers, while the University itself retains responsibility for those awards.

moderator - An academic appointed by the University to advise, guide and monitor Collaborative Centres in the management and delivery of schemes of study leading to its awards.

moderator champions - Specialist staff appointed to support moderators.

quality forum (plural **fora**) - Committee(s) set up in Accredited and Affiliated Institutions to consider issues relating to academic quality.

seceding institutions - See Annex A, paragraph v.

strategic languages - The seven languages that have been approved for teaching courses accredited by the University.

validated schemes of study - Programmes provided at partner institutions (Accredited and Affiliated Institutions and Collaborative Centres) leading to awards by the University.

Annex A: The University of Wales and its mission

i. The University of Wales was founded by Royal Charter in 1893 as a federal institution, which at the time of the previous Institutional review in 2004 comprised eight member institutions (Aberystwyth; Bangor; Cardiff; the College of Medicine; Lampeter; Swansea; University of Wales, Newport and the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC)), each of which awarded University of Wales degrees. Two of these member institutions merged in 2004 and the merged institution obtained approval for the title Cardiff University. This merged institution left the University of Wales in August 2004, and began awarding degrees under its own existing powers, but continued to use University of Wales degrees for schemes in medicine and dentistry and some related subjects. The University of Wales is primarily a degree awarding body and not a teaching institution. The Registry of the University is in Cardiff.

ii. Three other Welsh HEIs offered programmes leading to the award of a University of Wales degree, as Associated Institutions of the University: The North East Wales Institute of Higher Education (NEWI); Swansea Institute of Higher Education; and Trinity College Carmarthen. A fourth institution, the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD), offered University awards through its validated provision. The University's Validation Board, established in 1974, oversees University of Wales awards offered through collaborative arrangements with institutions offering higher education programmes in the UK and overseas.

iii. Following the Institutional review in 2004, which gave judgements of limited confidence in the soundness of the management by the University of the quality of programmes and the academic standards of awards offered at member and associated institutions (but confidence in respect of awards offered in collaboration with partners and administered by the University's Validation Unit), and a concurrent review (The Wigley Review) of its roles and functions commissioned by the University itself, significant changes were made to the governance and management of the University, whereby the University became a unitary institution with a revised Royal Charter, a new smaller Council, a new full-time Vice-Chancellor and revised management structures.

iv. In 2006, the University introduced a devolved model of quality assurance whereby quality and standards would be the immediate responsibility of those former federal institutions offering University of Wales degrees which had either existing or newly acquired appropriate degree awarding powers. Interim arrangements applied to the remaining institutions until they acquired such powers. In all cases, the University of Wales retains ultimate responsibility for the quality and standards of its awards. Participating institutions are now categorised as 'accredited' (institutions in Wales where the University awards degrees to at least one third of its students) or 'affiliated' (less than one third). Collectively, they are known as Accredited and Affiliated Institutions (AAls). Collaborative arrangements remain substantially as before with institutions worldwide, where the University validates programmes of study, being designated 'Collaborative Centres' (CCs).

v. In 2008, three universities, Aberystwyth, Bangor and Swansea, decided to use their own degree awarding powers and will cease to be Accredited Institutions. All students taking the University's awards at these 'seceding institutions' will have completed their awards by 2012-13. Cardiff University will also cease to be an Affiliated Institution. RWCMD has ceased offering University of Wales degrees. Swansea University will continue as an Affiliated Institution as it will continue to offer University of Wales awards in medicine.

vi. In 2009, the University entered into an arrangement known as the Alliance with the remaining institutions: Glyndŵr University (formerly NEWI); Swansea Metropolitan University

(formerly Swansea Institute of Higher Education); UWIC; the University of Wales Newport; Trinity University College; and the University of Wales Lampeter. The latter two merged in 2010 to form the University of Wales Trinity St David. The aims of the Alliance are stated to be to foster closer cooperation to respond to and meet the needs of the economy, business and culture of Wales, to identify and exploit collaborative opportunities to increase capacity across a range of academic and support areas, to work towards more effective and efficient use of resources, and to share good practice and provide developmental opportunities for its members.

vii. The University is the second largest degree awarding body in the UK. In 2010, it awarded 20,000 degrees and other awards. There are currently nine AAls in Wales and 120 CCs in 29 countries. In 2010 there were 33,670 undergraduate students studying at Welsh institutions and 11,828 studying at CCs. There were also 10,614 postgraduate students studying at Welsh institutions and 16,333 studying at CCs.

Mission statement

viii. The University's mission is defined in terms of purpose, to serve Wales and includes 'maintaining the University of Wales degree and the University of Wales brand as global exemplars of excellence and quality, thereby supporting and promoting Welsh Higher Education (HE) and contributing positively and significantly to the brand image and brand value of Welsh HE and of Wales as a whole, in collaborative provision and in partnership with other Welsh university institutions and with others in Wales, supporting and facilitating strategic initiatives in Welsh higher education'. A further dimension to its mission is to enrich the national life of Wales through its activities, encapsulated in the phrase 'to take the best of Wales to the world and bring the best of the world to Wales'.

Developments since the previous academic quality review

ix. The University addressed the judgements and recommendations of the Institutional review in 2004 through the changes to governance and administration and the adoption of the devolved model (see paragraph xii), and has made further changes appropriate to the changing relationships with AAls, including those ceasing to offer awards of the University (see paragraph v).

x. In 2008 the University commissioned a Risk Review of Collaborative Provision. All 32 recommendations in the Risk Review report (produced in January 2010) had been considered by the University. At the time of this Institutional review, all but three had been, or were being, addressed through a 12-point action plan; in a few cases where a recommendation was not followed, the University had sought to deal with the issue in question by taking alternative steps (see paragraphs 4.5; 6.2-6.3 in the main body of this report).

xi. Three QAA Audits of overseas provision have taken place since 2004. Reports for John Cabot University (2004) and St Petersburg Christian University (2007) praised the Quality Assurance Handbook and the role of the moderator. The recommendations from both have been addressed, including additions to programme specifications and to external examiner and moderator reports, and fuller initial vetting processes. A concern over equivalency of standards has also been addressed by the formation of an Equivalency Committee. The QAA Audits of overseas provision report on Fazley International College, Malaysia, had just been published at the time of the Institutional review and its recommendations have been referred to the Learning and Teaching Committee for consideration in December 2010.

Institutional review

xii. The University's working arrangements with the AAls are evolving within a Devolved Model for Quality and Standards (the 'devolved model'). The development of new governance and management structures, including the creation of a Faculty with recently appointed staff, is providing the appropriate support for collaborative provision and to take forward the University's Strategic Plan 2010-14. The recently formed Alliance offers great potential for many Welsh institutions to work cooperatively to enhance students' learning opportunities at their institutions. In particular, the Alliance's Thematic Groups have already demonstrated that there is a willingness to share good practice.

xiii. Overall, the review team considered that the University had responded appropriately to internal reviews in the period since the previous QAA Institutional review.

Annex B: QAA's Institutional review process

About the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

The primary responsibility for academic standards and quality in UK higher education rests with individual universities and colleges, each of which is independent and self-governing. QAA checks how well they meet their responsibilities, identifying good practice and making recommendations for improvement. QAA also publishes guidelines to help universities and colleges develop effective systems to ensure students have a high quality experience.

One of QAA's core functions is to carry out reviews and report to the public on how universities and other higher education providers maintain the quality of the learning opportunities they offer to students and the academic standards of the awards they make. In Wales, this process is known as Institutional review. QAA operates similar but separate processes in England and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland.

Institutional review

The aims of Institutional review are to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges are:

- providing higher education awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard
- exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

Judgements

The Institutional review team makes judgements about the university based on:

- the confidence they can place in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards
- the confidence they can place in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes.

These judgements are expressed as either **confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence** and are accompanied by examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

The words 'academic standards' are used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK.

Academic quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for them.

Nationally agreed standards

Institutional review uses a set of nationally agreed reference points, known as the Academic Infrastructure, to consider an institution's standards and quality. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), which include descriptions of different higher education qualifications
- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study, and which outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

The review process

Institutional reviews are carried out by a team comprising academics and one student member, who review the way in which institutions oversee their academic quality and standards.

The main elements of Institutional review are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution nine months before the review visit
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the review visit
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the review visit
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the review team five weeks before the review visit
- the review visit, which lasts five days
- the publication of a report on the review team's judgements and findings 22 weeks after the review visit.

The evidence for the review

To get the evidence for its judgement, the review team carries out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, such as regulations, policy statements, codes of practice, recruitment publications and minutes of relevant meetings, as well as the self-evaluation document itself
- reviewing the written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff
- talking to students about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the Academic Infrastructure.

The review team also gathers evidence by focusing on examples of the institution's internal quality assurance processes at work using 'thematic trails'. These trails may focus on how well institutional processes work at local level and across the institution as a whole.

Institutions are required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 04/05 *Information on quality and standards in higher education*, published by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.

Annex C: Response from the University

The University is pleased to note the findings of the review team that:

'confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards'

'confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students'.

The features of good practice identified in the report will assist the University in developing further these important aspects of its work.

The recommendations contained in the report are seen as constructive and helpful and are being addressed as a matter of priority. Indeed, work on many of these has begun already, and a detailed action plan has been submitted to QAA.

The University wishes to record its thanks to all members of the review team for the constructive manner in which they engaged with University staff, colleagues and student representatives.

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