QAA

Swansea University

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

May 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Swansea University. The review took place from 12 to 16 May 2014 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Ian Duce
- Professor Diane Meehan
- Dr Stephen Ryrie
- Mr James Freeman (student reviewer)
- Mr Tony Platt (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Swansea University and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - threshold academic standards[1]
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the information provided about learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides commentaries on the theme topic
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] Background information about Swansea University is given at the end of this report. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for Institutional Review of higher education institutions in Wales[3] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

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[1] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us
[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/ir-wales

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Swansea University

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Swansea University.

- Academic standards at the University **meet** UK expectations for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.
- Information about learning opportunities produced by the University **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University is **commended**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Swansea University.

- The Academic Career Pathway contributes positively to sustaining and enhancing the students' learning experience (paragraph 2.1.2).
- The Swansea Academy of Learning and Teaching evaluating and developing policy and practice in learning and teaching, together with the well planned and well attended programme of staff development, contribute to the quality of students' learning opportunities (paragraph 2.2.3).
- Subject specialist library staff provide good support to students and liaise effectively with the colleges (paragraph 2.2.10).
- A wide range of student feedback, including NSS, is used to enhance the student experience (paragraph 2.3.5).
- The University has a coordinated approach to developing student employability through a wide range of initiatives (paragraph 2.7.4).
- Undergraduate students are partners in the development of enhancement initiatives (paragraph 4.6).
- The Swansea Employability Academy, the Swansea Academy of Inclusivity and Learner Support, the Swansea Academy of Learning and Teaching, and the Academi Hywel Teifi contribute to the development, evaluation and dissemination of projects that enhance students' wider learning experience (paragraph 4.13).
- The University employs a range of mobility and internationalisation initiatives which contribute to students' personal and career development (paragraph 4.14).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Swansea University.

From the start of the 2014-15 academic year

- The University should clearly articulate at module and programme level the models of moderation in operation (paragraph 1.3.4).

From the start of the 2015-16 academic year

- The University should implement a system to enable it to have oversight of student achievement on its postgraduate research programmes (paragraph 2.4.4).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that Swansea University is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The University is taking action to ensure learning outcomes are expressed in a manner consistent with the expectations of the FHEQ (paragraph 1.1.3).
- The University is taking steps to monitor and improve the accuracy and completeness of definitive programme information (paragraph 3.11).

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the operational description and handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Institutional Review in Wales](#).[4]

About Swansea University

The University is an ambitious research-led university which aims to become a top 30 institution in the UK. It seeks to produce research which is globally collaborative and internationally recognised and use this to drive growth, prosperity and community enrichment. The University aims to produce, through research-led and practise-driven teaching, an outstanding experience for its over 17,000 students, 2,560 of them international, supported by 2,500 staff FTEs. The institution has ambitious plans for growth in key academic areas and aims to stimulate the knowledge economy of south west Wales through partnerships with industry and government, a key feature being a significant new 65-acre campus development, the Science and Innovation (or Bay) Campus, which is scheduled to open in 2015 and will also allow increased capacity and renovation at the main campus at Singleton Park.

The University is managed through a Senior Management Team consisting of the Vice Chancellor, the Registrar and Chief Operating Officer, the Director of Finance, and pro vice chancellors whose portfolios have been refined to give specific remits for the Estate; Internationalisation and External Affairs; Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; STEM, Medical and Health Science; Research; Strategic Development and Change Management; and Student Experience and Academic Quality Enhancement. The last portfolio has provided a focus across the University for the theme of partnership with students, consistent with the principles of the Wales Initiative for Student Engagement (WISE).

The University received its Royal Charter in 1920 and in 2005 obtained its own degree awarding powers. From 2011, all students have received Swansea University, rather than University of Wales, awards. There have been a number of recent organisational changes. With effect from 2011, the University adopted a new college structure which built on earlier reorganisation to improve critical mass and efficiency, academic coherence and teaching and research synergies. There are now seven colleges, each with a common governance structure: Arts and Humanities; Business and Economics; Engineering; Human and Health Sciences; Law; Medicine; Science. Key performance indicators have been established for

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/ir-wales.

each academic discipline within the colleges, aligned with the targets, and information tools for monitoring, required to enable the University to achieve its top-30 ambition.

A revised academic infrastructure has a University Learning and Teaching Committee with core membership consisting of Chairs of College Learning and Teaching Committees. Its subcommittee for Collaborative Provision is now a full committee reporting to Senate and a Regulations, Quality and Standards Committee has the primary responsibility, devolved from Senate, for academic standards and quality assurance. Other Senate academic committees are Research, Recruitment and Admissions and Use of Welsh. There are three Academic Boards (Undergraduate, Taught Postgraduate and Postgraduate Research), with a Dean for each and associate deans from each college.

Four academies coordinate work across the University, led by senior staff and supported by staff from the Planning and Strategic Projects Unit to raise awareness of particular themes of the University Strategic Plan. The Swansea Academy of Learning and Teaching was established in 2009 to promote innovative and inclusive teaching, learning and assessment and support academic staff development. The Swansea Employability Academy was founded in 2010 to enhance student employability and entrepreneurial skills both within and outside academic programmes. The Swansea Academy of Inclusivity and Learner Support began in 2013 to make University study more accessible and help prospective and current students achieve their potential. The Academi Hywel Teifi was established in 2010 to develop Welsh-medium education across the academic disciplines.

The University replaced a joint programme with Cardiff University with its own Graduate Entry Medicine programme which admitted students in 2009, with the first full cohort due to graduate with full General Medical Council accreditation in July 2014. In 2008, a partnership with Navitas UK Holdings Ltd established the International College Wales Swansea (ICWS) as an embedded pathway college based on the University campus and offering pathways for international students who would not otherwise meet requirements for entry to the University's undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. It is overseen by the Academic Advisory Committee and the Joint Strategic Partnership Board and has its own internal organisational structure consistent with that of other colleges of the Navitas UK network. The agreement between ICWS and the University has twice been reviewed, with the outcomes received by Senate.

The University sees its immediate challenges as being similar to the rest of the sector, including the implications of fees, meeting student expectations and readiness for the full implementation of the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education, but also includes meeting the expectations of the Welsh Government. It has taken the regional lead in developing the colleges and Universities Skills Partnership and has validated foundation degrees in collaboration with local colleges. To facilitate international mobility and enable global graduates, the University has reviewed its curriculum and credit structure and delivery to facilitate periods of work or study abroad and continues to make strategic alliances with overseas institutions with a view to future joint awards.

The University is aware of its responsibilities to promote the Welsh Language. It appointed a Welsh Language Officer in 2009 and revised its Welsh Language Scheme in 2011. A new Welsh website is in place and the University aims to maintain parity between its information provision in both languages. It works to build Welsh language opportunities for its students and the number of modules available in the Welsh medium is increasing. In addition to its own Academy dedicated to Welsh language and culture, it is an active participant in the activities of Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

Explanation of the findings about Swansea University

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.[5]

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms[6] is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.[7]

1   Academic standards

Outcome

The academic standards at Swansea University **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1   The University's programmes of study are aligned with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* in their credit weighting and levels. In its Code of Practice for Quality Assurance (CPQA) the University states that its award descriptors incorporate those articulated in *Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), although the review team learned that the adoption of level conventions of 4-6 for undergraduate study and 7 for taught postgraduate provision would only be fully implemented in the 2014-15 session.

1.1.1   The review team found evidence of the alignment at many levels. Module and programme approval processes require the confirmation of level designations and guidance is provided for staff in the University's handbooks on developing new modules and taught programmes. Reports from programme validation events and the minutes from relevant committees, in particular the Programme Approval Committee (PAC), demonstrate that level and programme descriptors are considered as part of programme approval and the review team can confirm from its reading that such consideration may result in recommendations or referrals back to proposing programme teams.

1.1.2   In 2011, the University devolved the process of approval of new modules to the College Learning and Teaching Committees (CLTCs) and undertook a review which generally concluded the process was working effectively. The responsibility for oversight was allocated in 2013 to the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Academic Boards who undertook a review of samples of new modules. In the reports made available to the review team, the Postgraduate Academic Board drew a number of conclusions, including that learning outcomes were often not at level 7 and sometimes not measurable or linked to assessment. In discussion with the review team, the University clarified the draft status of the report and stressed that the concern identified related to the wording of the outcomes which could be improved to better demonstrate alignment with the FHEQ. The University also commented that external examiners consistently confirm that standards of awards are appropriate, as the

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review team was able to verify, and indicated that the next step was to review all modules and follow up the report with staff development.

1.1.3   The University has mapped its processes against the relevant Chapters of the Quality Code and has concluded that it meets the Expectation of *Chapter A1: The national level.* From the evidence available, the review team agrees with this analysis, while it **affirms** the action being taken by the University to ensure that learning outcomes are expressed in a manner consistent with the expectations of the FHEQ.

Use of external examiners

1.2   The University has comprehensive regulations relating to the external examining of taught programmes set out in the CPQA and mapped against relevant chapters of the Quality Code, particularly *Chapter B7: External examining*.

1.2.1   Nominations for new external examiners are scrutinised by the Academic Registry and relevant University Dean, with potential reciprocal arrangements or conflicts of interest being referred to the Pro Vice Chancellor Student Experience and Academic Quality Enhancement before appointment by the Academic Boards on behalf of the University's Regulations, Quality and Standards Committee (RQSC). The review team saw documentary evidence that this process may result in referral or refusal of nominations and concluded that it is robust. A database of current external examiners is kept by the Academic Registry and the circumstances in which their contracts may be terminated are explicitly defined within the CPQA. The University provides training and mentoring, including an induction event, which University staff may also attend, and relevant web pages, including a Code of Practice for External Examining with comprehensive guidance on roles, responsibilities and procedures. External examiners express satisfaction with the information provided.

1.2.2   The University uses subject external examiners who oversee the standards of a discipline and normally a named programme and in some areas appoint chief external examiners who oversee a team of externals. Both roles are clearly defined in the CPQA and include the expectations to review and approve assessment tasks, to ensure that the University's policy on moderation is applied, and to attend examination boards in order to confirm outcomes and comment on the assessment process and conduct of the boards. External examiners submit their reports electronically on a standard template that invites comments on the appropriateness of standards, the consistency of learning outcomes with subject benchmarks and any professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements, aspects of innovative practice, matters concerning urgent attention, and whether their previous recommendations have been responded to. The review team was able to read a large number of reports which were positive in almost every case and routinely confirmed the appropriate setting and maintenance of academic standards.

1.2.3   There is robust scrutiny of external examiner reports at all levels of the University, initially by the Academic Registry and relevant pro vice chancellor for matters of institutional concern, then by colleges for consideration by college Boards of Study and Learning and Teaching Committees. The reports and college responses are appraised by the Academic Boards who advise RQSC. The Academic Registry produces an Annual Digest considered by RQSC and distributed to all external examiners. The review team read a large number of college and University level boards and committee minutes which demonstrated a thorough and conscientious approach to responding to and addressing any issues raised within the reports.

1.2.4   At the time of the review, external examiner reports were made available to student representatives through their college and University level committee roles and this was confirmed by those representatives who met the review team. Students who were not

representatives had not in general seen these reports, though the review team heard that from the start of the 2014-15 academic year the University is intending to make reports routinely available to all students and has set in motion the changes necessary to ensure this happens.

1.2.5   The review team considers that the University has a well developed set of regulations and procedures governing external examining and saw a wide range of evidence that these procedures are working effectively and consistently across the institution. It concluded that the University is making scrupulous use of external examiners.

Assessment and standards

1.3   The University has measures in place to ensure that the design, approval, monitoring and review of assessments give students the opportunity to demonstrate the learning outcomes of their awards.

1.3.1   Assessment regulations are approved by the RQSC and Senate and Academic Boards review assessments annually using a range of feedback, including that of external examiners and students.

1.3.2   The University provides comprehensive information for staff and students in the CPQA and Feedback and Assessment Policy (FAP) which sets out clearly the principles of diverse, robust and reliable assessment and policies relating to appeals, extenuation, late submission, marking, moderation and the right to be assessed in Welsh. Students are not awarded credit for condonement or compensation and are not eligible for awards unless the required learning outcomes have been met. The policy on extenuating circumstances is operated centrally through Academic Registry and the Student Cases Committee to ensure consistency of practice. The needs of students with specific educational requirements are supported through the Disability Office, Examinations Office, disability link tutors and module coordinators.

1.3.3   College and programme handbooks and the Student Charter also set out information on assessment. Procedures for programme approval and review require the inclusion of assessment strategies in programme documentation and the review team can confirm that assessment strategies are considered during these processes. colleges are required to provide students with schedules of assessment and feedback at the start of the year and marking criteria are set out in handbooks. Students consider that the guidance provided on assessment to be helpful but that grading criteria are not always fully understood by students. The National Student Survey (NSS) scores show that overall satisfaction with assessment has improved since the last Institutional Review took place.

1.3.4   The CPQA sets out guidance on marking and moderation. All assessed work is submitted and marked anonymously, so far as the assessment format permits. The University accepts variety in moderation, recognising the varying demands of different disciplines and assessment types. Colleges are expected to select and make explicit to students the most appropriate practices for their programmes from five models outlined in the CPQA, and external examiners are asked to comment on the moderation process in their reports. While the University's guidance is clear, the review team saw a number of instances in minutes of college Learning and Teaching Committees, Boards of Study and Student/Staff meetings and in a small number of external examiner reports of a lack of clarity regarding the mode of moderation being operated, and sometimes handbooks simply referred students back to the CPQA guidance. The review team r**ecommends** that the University should clearly articulate at module and programme level the models of moderation in operation.

1.3.5   The remit of assessment boards is clearly set out in the CPQA and college examination officers also receive a handbook and training for their roles. The University's Superintendent of Assessment is charged with the promotion of academic integrity and avoidance of unfair practice.

1.3.6   The University's policy on feedback on assessment requires a turnaround time of three weeks, with adherence monitored currently by colleges and, from 2014-15, by the University's Learning and Teaching Committee. Student feedback on the operation of this policy was variable; some students felt the policy was generally adhered too, while others gave examples of feedback taking longer.

1.3.7   Training in assessment is available for all staff through the Swansea Academy of Learning and Teaching (SALT) and the Development and Training Services. The review team saw evidence of good practice and innovation being disseminated through these means. The University is currently undertaking a number of projects to further enhance assessment and feedback, including the roll-out of online/electronic assessment and feedback tools, which were generally regarded as positive by students. Staff also confirmed that through a Curriculum Reform Project they are reviewing assessment strategies and evaluating the overall assessment burden. The University is encouraging and supporting the development of authentic assessment and more firmly embedding the delivery and assessment of generic skills within the curriculum (see paragraph 4.9).

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.4   The University has comprehensive and effective processes in place for the design, approval, monitoring and review of its programmes.

1.4.1   The processes are clearly described in the CPQA, supplemented by informative guidance documentation on developing new modules and new programmes and processes relating specifically to collaborative provision. Specific information for student reviewers in these processes is currently being developed and the review team found the draft version to be effective. Training for staff and students participating in approval and review events is provided and found by staff to be useful.

1.4.2   The committee framework for the design, approval and review of modules and programmes operates at University and college levels. At college level, Boards of Study are responsible for initiating and developing new programme proposals and undertaking annual module and programme reviews, while CLTCs scrutinise new programme proposals before they are considered at the next level and have devolved responsibility for the approval of new modules, for Annual Programme Review (APR), Periodic Programme Review (PPR) and for monitoring action plans. The review team read a large number of these minutes which showed the committees meet frequently and carry out their responsibilities diligently and in line with their terms of reference. At University level, the approval process is operationalised by the Programme Approval Committee (PAC) which recommends validation methods based on risk: by committee for low risk, by enhanced committee for medium risk, and full validation by panel for all new provision or proposals deemed high risk, including all collaborative provision. Each method involves input from external assessors or subject specialists and, where appropriate, by employers. PAC and the Strategic Programme Development Group reports to the Regulations, Quality and Standards Committee, which has delegated authority from Senate to approve new programmes. The review team were able to read a number of documents relating to the approval process which demonstrated effective college and University oversight and thorough consideration of documentation.

1.4.3   Annual module and programme reviews are initially managed at college level through Boards of Study and through CLTCs which identify and respond to college-wide

issues. At University level, the cross-institutional Academic Boards also review the Annual Monitoring Reports and produce an annual summary report for RQSC. The samples of reports and committee minutes seen by the review team were completed carefully and accompanied by action plans. Committee and Board minutes showed thorough consideration of the reports at every level and the review team concludes that the process is robust and effective.

1.4.4　All programmes are subject to PPR, normally quinquennially but the cycle may be modified if there are major changes, extensive PSRB engagements, successive positive APR outcomes or a previous Student Experience Engagement. The review panel is chaired by a senior academic and includes external and student input. The review documentation is comprehensive and there is evidence that it is carefully considered. PPR may be triggered by a Student Experience Engagement which is set in motion particularly when an area has been seen to underperform against a range of indicators, especially student satisfaction. A development from the previous Cause for Concern scheme, the aim of the engagements is to help the subject area to address the concerns identified and there are three possible levels from a meeting to a more extensive audit or to a full PPR. The process is also designed to identify and disseminate good practice.

1.4.5　The University maintains a record of all programmes subject to PSRB accreditation or oversight. RQSC ensures that colleges respond appropriately to their reports and have addressed any issues raised and determine whether they raise any broader University issues.

1.4.6　A clear procedure for suspension and withdrawal of programmes is outlined in the CPQA and managed by the Academic Boards. At the time of the review team's visit, there was evidence that in some areas of the University the portfolio of modules and programmes was undergoing considerable change. In some cases the evidence seen by the team demonstrated efficient management of closure processes, including consultation with staff and students, although in others, despite adherence to the University procedures, change was extensive and had attracted negative comment from both parties. Notwithstanding this observation, the review team concludes that the University's processes for design, approval, monitoring and review of its provision met the Expectation stated in the Quality Code.

Subject benchmarks

1.5　Subject and qualification benchmarks are central in defining academic standards and awards in the University.

1.5.1　The CPQA includes reference in its processes for approval, monitoring and reviewing of programmes to subject benchmarks, qualification statements and, where appropriate, PSRB requirements and the *Foundation Degree qualifications benchmark*. The Developing and Approving New Taught Programmes of Study Handbook lists current subject benchmark statements and they are also referenced in the Programme Creation Template and emphasised in the programme periodic review process. External examiner reports also require verification of a programme's fit with the relevant subject benchmark statement.

1.5.2　The review team can confirm from the minutes of college Boards of Study, Learning and Teaching Committees, PAC and reports of a number of programme approval events, that subject benchmark statements and PSRB requirements, where relevant, are consistently considered. Although the University's guidance is equally explicit about their consideration in periodic programme review, reports from these events did not always capture this discussion clearly.

2   Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at Swansea University **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1   The University ensures that staff who contribute to teaching and the support of learning are suitably qualified, supported and recognised by means of a range of measures.

2.1.1   Newly appointed staff are required to undertake a programme leading to a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education. The review team heard from staff who had undertaken the programme that this was valuable in module planning and delivery and in providing contacts with other teachers. Academic staff are expected to take part in a system of peer observation which is regarded by them as a valuable way of encouraging reflection.

2.1.2   The University's award-winning approach to staff recognition and development seeks to recognise accomplished teaching and the promotion of student learning. The Academic Career Pathways, aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework, distinguish career progression routes based on teaching and management from those based on teaching and research, defining core and enhanced criteria at every grade. There is a progression path to professorial level for staff whose main focus is teaching and scholarship and management and student support. External examining is also a criterion for promotion. This approach is clearly understood by staff who value the evidence-based approach to promotion and the flexibility to redirect their career pathway over time. A Professional Development Review (PDR) process, introduced in 2011, includes an annual meeting between staff and line managers to discuss performance against key performance indicators (KPIs), including measures of student satisfaction based on NSS scores and module evaluations. Online feedback is collected from staff to evaluate the process. The contribution made by the Academic Career Pathway to sustaining and enhancing the student learning experience is **good practice**.

Learning resources

2.2   The University provides appropriate resources to allow students to achieve the learning outcomes of their programmes, ranging from effective teaching and support staff to learning resources and teaching accommodation.

2.2.1   The University is committed to research-led and practice-driven teaching and has adopted a strategy to establish this principle in a systematic manner across the institution from 2014 onwards, building on the experience and networks of the Swansea Academy of Learning and Teaching (SALT) (see paragraph 4.7.2). It is expected that explicit articulation of the relationships between research and scholarship and the curriculum will emerge from this project and be embedded in a range of curriculum monitoring documentation.

2.2.2   The professional development of teaching staff is supported by a programme of staff development courses provided by the University's Development and Training Services. Over 100 courses are offered annually, ranging from aspects of learning and teaching, research skills and resource management through to health and safety. During 2013-14 up to the time of the review visit, 853 individuals had attended at least one course.

2.2.3   The role of SALT in evaluating and developing policy and practice in learning and teaching, together with the well planned and attended programme of staff development is **good practice**.

2.2.4   The strategy for the appointment of teaching staff was described to the review team as a bottom-up system. Requirements are identified within subject disciplines and considered by colleges within their annual budgeting, subject to the oversight of the University's senior management within the institution's overall resourcing strategy.

2.2.5   Students are allocated a personal tutor who is trained for the role in accordance with University policy and the Student Charter. Staff who met the review team saw tutoring as an important feature of student support, as did students who were able to provide examples of support given. Technical and administrative support is available to students within the colleges. The team learned that since the reorganisation of academic units, the focus for administrative support in particular had changed and students found the quality variable.

2.2.6   Students met by the review team were less than satisfied with some aspects of the teaching accommodation, commenting on the dated condition of some rooms and the inability of the timetable to deal efficiently with overcrowding. In some academic units, postgraduate research students did not feel they were provided with adequate dedicated space or IT facilities. However, staff and students knew about the ongoing refurbishment programme and were aware of mechanisms by which they could report problems to the estate's department, which was regarded as very responsive. They also felt that their voice was heard in decisions on how to deploy funding for learning resources.

2.2.7   The physical learning resource lies within the University estates strategy. A transformational development underway is the construction of a 65-acre Science and Innovation Campus (also known as Bay Campus) which will become available to students in September 2015. The review team was told that the new learning spaces and relocation of academic units to the campus will release space and enable further investment in facilities at the main Singleton Park Campus.

2.2.8   Computing, library, employability and administrative information are brought together in Information Services and Systems which sets out its strategic goals in a comprehensive document. The University is aware of the major challenge in meeting rapidly changing demands for IT provision. It has invested in desktop computers and software to enable students to locate available machines, together with portable devices for loan, but some students continue to find provision inadequate. The review team were told how the University has responded to the use of mobile devices by providing a pervasive wireless network which has now been extended into associated spaces such as the hospital, with imaginative plans to extend to further public spaces such as libraries and museums.

2.2.9   The Learning Innovation Group includes representatives from SALT and CLTCs and has evolved from the e-learning group to provide a forum for the development of innovative and inclusive approaches to learning and teaching designed to enhance the student experience (see paragraphs 2.5.4, 2.8.3 and 4.10). Each module has a site on the University's virtual learning environment (VLE) and the Learning and Teaching Committee sets minimum standards for content. Training and support for teaching using the VLE is provided by SALT, including guidance on inclusive teaching practices. Students reported that, although their modules all had an electronic presence, the richness of the content was variable and materials were not always available 24 hours in advance. The University has piloted and evaluated standard packages for online submission, assessment and feedback on student work and intends to make this mandatory from autumn 2014. Staff and students

were generally enthusiastic about this development but expressed some concerns about the viability of implementation across the University.

2.2.10   The University has measurably improved in the last two years on scores for learning resources in the NSS, which were previously below the sector average. The review team heard that students were generally very satisfied with library provision and singled out the excellent support for their learning by the subject specialist team there, including that for off-campus postgraduate research students. Structures in place provide close liaison between the library team and the colleges, including attendance at CLTCs. The strong support provided by subject specialist library staff and their close liaison with the colleges is **good practice**.

Student voice

2.3   Student representation is well developed at Swansea University and student engagement contributes strongly to the ethos of students as partners. The University's approach is dynamic and reflective.

2.3.1   The Full-Time Officers (FTOs) of the Students' Union, who are elected by an online poll, provide student representation on senior University committees, including the Student Affairs Committee and the Swansea Academy of Inclusivity and Learner Support (SAILS). The review team learnt that there was a close working relationship between the University senior management and the FTOs which contributes significantly to an atmosphere of partnership, in alignment with the Welsh higher education sector initiative Future Directions - Students as Partners.

2.3.2   Student representatives at subject level are elected in an online ballot managed by the Students' Union and may be nominated by their peers as college representatives who sit on CLTCs and provide representatives for the Academic Boards, for whom the University provides a small bursary. The Students' Union gives useful guidance identifying possible issues for consideration at each level, and training events, with input from Academic Registry, are available, together with a well attended conference. Detailed demographic data is captured by online voting allowing monitoring of diversity. The review team noted that the data shows overall declining participation over the three years of the system's operation.

2.3.3   Subject representatives attend boards of study and staff-student forums which report to the CLTCs, although the review team noted that not all boards have student representatives yet. The team was able to review a large body of evidence on staff-student bodies which showed them to be effective arenas to enable concerns to be raised, with actions carried forward and fed back to students, although some students raised examples where colleges had not responded effectively.

2.3.4   The process for collecting student feedback is described in the CPQA. Students complete an online questionnaire at module level, available in Welsh and English, which is centrally operated, with a report fed back to the module team containing a quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the module's organisation and teaching, and results feeding into staff Personal Development Reviews. Students commented positively on the process but the team noted that although participation rates seemed to be rising, in some subject areas they remain below 30 per cent. At programme level, students may take part in periodic reviews or validation events. The University conducts an annual student experience survey of undergraduate years 1 and 2, in addition to participating in the NSS. Feedback on postgraduate provision is obtained from the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. Outside the formal structures and processes, focus groups and consultation events are used to obtain targeted feedback.

2.3.5   The University and Students' Union have reviewed the effectiveness of their systems and use the My UNI portal to encourage participation in surveys, including the NSS, with participation increased in 2013 and 2014. Outcomes from surveys, especially the NSS, are used for an institutional Student Experience Report and Action Plan. All colleges and services produce local responses considered at a joint meeting of LTC and the Student Affairs Committee and reported to the student body directly through My UNI. The NSS results feed into an Academic Quality Indicator Report which benchmarks the University subject by subject against institutional and sectoral levels. The analysis can trigger a Student Experience Engagement between representatives on RQSC, including students, and the subject team. The team found this to be a thoughtful and well embedded approach to using student-derived data. The coordinated use of a wide range of student feedback, including NSS, to enhance the student experience is **good practice**.

Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.4   The University produces and considers a wide range of management information to support quality and enhance standards in most of its provision.

2.4.1   A detailed data set about its undergraduate provision is prepared annually, based on indicators that include the NSS, student entry and progression statistics and Destination of Leavers of Higher Education outcomes, broken down by age, gender and ethnicity to college and programme levels. This is used effectively for annual and periodic monitoring and informs analysis and action plans.

2.4.2   Management information in relation to provision at the International College Wales Swansea (ICWS) is considered by the ICWS/SU Academic Advisory Committee (AAC). The Annual Assessment Report of the ICWS, together with analyses by colleges of the achievement of students progressing from ICWS, is used by the AAC to monitor the achievement of students admitted initially to ICWS. The review team saw evidence that AAC gives careful consideration to this data and uses it to plan action designed to improve student learning. Management information relating to the relatively small amount of other collaborative provision is considered by the Collaborative Provision Committee (CPC). The review team noted that each collaborative partner submitted an annual monitoring report with data on student progression and achievement and saw evidence that CPC gives them careful consideration.

2.4.3   The progression of students in under-represented groups and with protected characteristics was analysed for 2012-13 by Information Systems and Services with a view to establishing any patterns.

2.4.4   The University has compared its postgraduate research programmes to other universities and, recognising the need to improve its system for recording the progression of individual research students, has committed itself to establishing a bespoke online system to be operational from May 2014. However, the review team notes that there is no evidence of systematically collected and aggregated data relating to research postgraduate (PGR) entry, progression and completion or systematic report from the PGR Progression Board to its parent committee, the Academic Board PGR. Consequently, the review team **recommends** that the University should implement a system to enable it to have oversight of student achievement on its postgraduate research programmes.

Admission to the University

2.5   The policies used to admit students to the University are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

2.5.1   Policy and practice in admission of students to both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes is overseen by the Recruitment and Admissions Committee. Useful handbooks and training opportunities are provided for selectors, including the recently introduced and well attended Recruitment and Admissions Conference. The handbooks explain the role of the admissions office and information such as English language requirements for the University and ICWS programmes. Clearing and confirmation has a separate handbook setting out target numbers and admission procedures.

2.5.2   The admissions office receives applications and ensures that University and subject requirements can be met before forwarding the application to the relevant academic area with any additional information needed for decisions. This process ensures that at least one central and one college member of staff see all applications, ensuring consistency. Similarly, the postgraduate team of the admissions office liaises with postgraduate admission tutors in the colleges to ensure that taught postgraduate and PGR applicants are dealt with in a timely manner and is responsible for sending decisions about places and any studentships or industrial partner awards which might be available. Applicants who believe that the University's admissions procedures have been incorrectly or inconsistently applied have the right of appeal, with the Pro Vice Chancellor (Student Experience) making the final decision.

2.5.3   Information for candidates is extensive and attractive with well designed, interlinking and easily navigable web pages, and an online and printed prospectus. As required, information is available on any additional costs associated with each programme, in addition to the usual Key Information Sets data. Students told the review team that the website had been their main source of information before application. The University generally reviews information and the recruitment process each year and there is evidence that changes arising from the revised recruitment and admissions strategy have contributed to large increases in acceptances of University offers.

2.5.4   The University has a widening access policy covering 2011-14 and established the Swansea Academy of Inclusivity and Learner Support (SAILS) with a mission to widen access to people from diverse backgrounds and improve retention (see paragraph 4.11). The Academy has formulated a policy on the use of contextual factors in admissions, for use in confirmation from 2014 and fully from 2015. The University is also lead partner in the Reaching Wider in South West Wales programme, offering a reduced A Level tariff to applicants from under-represented groups attending a three-week year 12 summer programme.

Complaints and appeals

2.6   The University has a clear complaints and appeals procedure and there is much evidence to demonstrate that this is fair, accessible, timely and robust.

2.6.1   Comprehensive guidelines are available on the website, although students met by the review team were not clear about how they would make a complaint or appeal but were universally confident they could obtain guidance within colleges or the Students' Union. The review team is reassured, having reviewed handbooks and other materials and heard from academic and support staff, that the University is making every effort to signpost students to the procedures.

2.6.2   The grounds for complaint and appeal are clearly set out, as are the procedures students should follow, including students in partner institutions, who should use the partner's procedures in the first instance. All necessary documentation is available in English and Welsh. The University is seeking to increase the number of cases resolved informally at the first of the two-stage process and there is some evidence that a number of measures, including enabling students to check the accuracy of marks and revising the extenuating

circumstances policy, have reduced both the number of appeals proceeding to a formal hearing and the number of complaints escalated from the college to the University stage. Where students are dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint or appeal they may request a final review at University level and clear guidelines are provided on how they may refer their complaint, if it remains unresolved, to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

2.6.3   The remit and operation of the Academic Appeals Board is clearly described in the guidance. The review team notes that the panel does not normally meet face-to-face with the appellant, although there is provision for this in exceptional circumstances and, though arrangements are consistent with *Chapter B9: Academic appeals and student complaints* of the Quality Code, the review team questions whether they are optimally transparent. The team can confirm, however, that support for students making a complaint or appeal is available in the Students' Union Advice Centre, which students find valuable, and recognises the potential for effective early conciliation and resolution of issues in the presence of a trained mediator among the Advice Centre staff.

2.6.4   Complaints and appeals are reviewed annually and a reflective, evaluative summary is considered by RQSC. Although it is apparent that this report has been used to enhance the appeals and complaints processes, it is less clear how it has been used in a wider enhancement context.

Career advice and guidance

2.7   The approach to careers education, information, advice and guidance at the University is not only adequately quality assured but a significant and culture-changing aspect of its mission.

2.7.1   The Careers and Employability Service (CES) has a specific role relating to students, academic departments and employers. It has informative web pages, an engaging programme of events, including 'My employability week', and offers one-to-one support for students. CES works with large and small-to-medium enterprises and with the Go Wales programme. It coordinates work experience through the Week of Work and the Swansea Paid Internship Network. Students spoke very highly of the support offered by CES and graduates described the direct link between employability initiatives and full-time work. The Swansea Employability Award is a voluntary programme managed by CES in which students work to develop personal and employability skills which are recorded as part of their achievement profile in the Higher Education Achievement Record. The University is encouraging colleges to incorporate it in their assessed modules.

2.7.2   Careers and employability initiatives are managed by the University at a number of levels. The main performance indicator is the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education data which are part of the University's key performance indicators. This data is already encouraging and the strategic target is that 75 per cent of graduates in employment six months after graduation will be in a graduate-level job.

2.7.3   Between the central service for career education, CES, and the academic units within the colleges, the Swansea Employability Academy (SEA) has a key role in coordinating activities. A significant feature of the University's strategy is the embedding of employability in the curriculum. New and existing programmes are required at validation or review to identify employability themes aligned with graduate attributes. SEA Champions in CLTCs ensure a cross-institutional approach (see paragraph 4.10).

2.7.4   The review team found that employability at Swansea has a number of significant strengths and concludes that the University's coordinated approach to developing student employability through a range of initiatives is **good practice**.

Supporting disabled students

2.8   The University ensures that learning opportunities are managed at every level to enable the entitlements of disabled students to be met.

2.8.1   The Disability Office is the central focus for the operation of policy on disability, providing web pages with a set of guides aligned to the Equality Act 2010 and good practice in relation to specific learning difficulties. Students are encouraged to declare a disability on application or any time afterwards and the Disability/Wellbeing Centre then becomes their first point of contact. Pre-entry visits can be arranged for those with complex needs. The assessment centre in the Disability Office can identify the need for different forms of support and help with applications for funding. Where it has consent, it will advise the college about the student's needs.

2.8.2   The Disability Link Tutor is the key contact in the colleges who will share necessary information with personal tutors and teaching staff and ensure that adjustments required to the learning environment are in place, including extra time in exams. The VLE has undergone an accessibility audit and materials must now be put up 24 hours before a class. Training for markers, specialist librarians and other staff is available, while SALT web pages have valuable guides on inclusive teaching practices. SAILS also has an important strategic role in relation to inclusivity and support (see paragraph 4.11).

2.8.3   The review team saw much evidence of a reflective approach by the University to managing the learning environment in the interests of disabled students.

Supporting international students

2.9   The University provides good support for the quality of learning opportunities for international students.

2.9.1   The number of international students at the University has risen significantly in the last decade and the University wishes to increase their numbers to 17 per cent of the total student population by 2017.

2.9.2   The International Development Office (IDO) manages arrangements for international, visiting and exchange students. It maintains comprehensive web pages, including the International Prospectus, and handles enquiries from prospective students. The International Student Advisory Centre within Student Services produces the comprehensive International Student Handbook and has a team of advisers responsible for advice and support for international students and coordinates a one-week welcome and orientation event. The advice and support are accessible and high quality.

2.9.3   The English Language Training Service provides any necessary language support and offers a wide range of courses before arrival and during vacations. Additional support is available for students already on programmes through the Academic Success Programme and the team learned that personal tutors have successfully directed students towards this resource.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.10   The University has in place appropriate support and guidance to enable postgraduate research (PGR) students to complete their programmes and to ensure staff can fulfil their responsibilities.

2.10.1   Information on admission requirements and procedures, the regulatory framework, entitlements and expectations, and processes for monitoring progress, is available to PGR

students on a dedicated website. The review team heard that students found this information clear, detailed and helpful and that admission and induction arrangements are carried out with care.

2.10.2   The University aims to offer a research environment supportive enough to facilitate excellent research. PGR students spoke positively of this, citing good relations with supervisory teams, seminar programmes, the opportunity to participate in the work of research groups, financial support for conferences and professional development, and the personal care and support offered by the University's Wellbeing Service. The review team notes that the University attaches particular importance to collaborative work with industrial partners but did not find evidence of any systematic means by which it assures itself of the suitability of the research environment offered by partners responsible for joint supervision.

2.10.3   Research and other skills development for PGR students are provided through an extensive programme and students confirmed that they are expected, with their supervisors, to establish an individual training plan. Monitoring of individual students' progress is carried out through a system of annual reporting based on templates for students and supervisors. Students were familiar with expectations for monitoring their progress through central reporting and with recording the outcomes of their supervisory meetings.

2.10.4   The majority of PGR students undertake some teaching or assessment on undergraduate programmes and there is clear institutional guidance on the employment of students in teaching and related roles, including the requirement to take a training course beforehand. While students confirmed that this was the case, the review team formed the view that mentoring of students' teaching was not consistent in its nature.

2.10.5   The University obtains feedback on the views of PGR students through the biannual Postgraduate Research Experience Survey from which each college draws up an action plan which is monitored by the PGR Academic Board. Although students who spoke to the review team showed little awareness of the PGR Student Engagement Forum, a subcommittee of the PGR Academic Board, the review team found evidence that views expressed at the Forum had indeed led to some improvements in resources. However, since the PGR Academic Board appears not to receive reports from its other subcommittee, the PGR Progression Board, the team could not find evidence that it was in a position to fulfil its obligation to consider key performance indicators relating to PGR programmes (see the recommendation in paragraph 2.4.4).

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.11   The University's collaborative arrangements are managed effectively to enable students to achieve their awards. The quality of learning at collaborative partners is managed by the University according to the same principles and policies operating in on-campus provision.

2.11.1   The scope of collaborative provision has been relatively small, although as part of its internationalisation agenda, the University is developing a small number of strategic partners outside the UK and more locally has linked with further education colleges to deliver foundation degree programmes. The Collaborative Provision Committee (CPC) has responsibility for ensuring that collaborative arrangements are negotiated, agreed and managed in accordance with the University's policies and procedures and a comprehensive register of collaborative arrangements is in place. The University has mapped its procedures against *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* of the Quality Code and recognises the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*.

2.11.2   The process of selection and approval of new partners is governed by the Code of Practice for the Introduction and Approval of Higher Education Provision with Others, which includes requirements for risk assessments and due diligence to be undertaken, using standard templates. The review team notes, through their reading of documents relating to an Erasmus Mundus master's programme and a new European university partner, evidence of carefully conducted processes for approval, subsequent management through the establishment of an Operational Group, and regular monitoring by CPC. The team also saw evidence of the effective operation of Joint Boards of Study, including consideration of curriculum development, learning resources and student support in the partner institutions.

2.11.3   ICWS provides on-campus programme pathways for international students to mainstream University programmes. The AAC is responsible for managing the partnership and the review team saw evidence from its minutes that it conducts this role diligently, for instance in reviewing the recognition agreement and the outcomes of ICWS Periodic Programme Reviews (PPRs). The quality of learning opportunities provided at ICWS is subject to the same procedures for annual monitoring as the University's own programmes but is permitted to operate its own procedures for periodic programme review. The review team notes from its reading of such a review that it was conducted thoroughly but that the composition of the review panel was significantly different from reviews conducted within the University. The outcomes of the PPRs are considered by appropriate colleges of the University, in respect of curriculum issues, with AAC oversight. The review team considers this arrangement to be robust.

2.11.4   Link tutors support partnerships with further education colleges and ICWS and have specific roles in relation to quality enhancement, staff development, resource provision, and communication and reporting, which are outlined in the Link Tutor Handbook. Link tutors spoke knowledgeably about their role and confirmed that staff at partner colleges participate in staff development opportunities at the University. They make an effective contribution to ensuring that learning experiences for those studying in the partner institutions are comparable to those of onsite students.

2.11.5   The University appoints agents to assist with international recruitment. The review team heard that the International Development Office (IDO) monitors and supports agents' work in a variety of ways, including a handbook, website portal, newsletter and conference. Information about the University and its programmes that appears on agents' websites is monitored for accuracy by the IDO. Promotional material for collaborative provision is signed off by the Head of Marketing, with advice on curriculum content from link tutors. Certificates for programmes completed in collaboration with partner institutions make appropriate mention of both parties. The review team concludes that these procedures are sound.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.12   The University has only one programme, the BA Humanities, provided through flexible and distributed learning, which is intended for mature learners studying part-time. The review team saw evidence of careful and thoughtful management of the quality of the programme, including arrangements for admission and enrolment, the development of study skills, the progress of individual students and the arrangements for supporting the delivery of modules and availability of resources at the programme's centres, together with consideration of outcomes of the NSS.

2.12.1   Students spoke positively of the support provided by the University for their studies and confirmed that they have the same opportunities to evaluate their learning as on-campus students.

Work-based and placement learning

2.13   The University offers an extensive range of work placements for students, especially in the College of Human and Health Sciences. Foundation degrees offered at partner institutions also contain a work-based learning element. The review team saw and heard evidence that these are managed effectively.

2.13.1   Relationships, entitlements and responsibilities of students, employers and the University are set out in a tripartite agreement to which each party must subscribe, and a Work Based Learning Mentoring Handbook provides helpful guidance for mentors and mentees.

2.13.2   The quality of work-based learning is assured within the University's standard processes for approval, monitoring and review. The review team saw evidence from the documentation for approval of a foundation degree programme of careful consideration of the work-based element and comments, of variable levels, by external examiners on the work-based elements of programmes.

Student charter

2.14   The Student Charter sets out the mutual expectations of the University and its students. It is the shared responsibility of the University and Students' Union and is seen by the latter as an example of its positive relationship with the University.

2.14.1   The Student Charter is available in both electronic and paper form and in English and Welsh. Student representatives are well aware of the Charter and told the team that they regard it as a satisfactory expression of the responsibilities of students and the University. Both the University and the Students' Union acknowledge the need to raise awareness of the Charter and are considering new ways of making it accessible, including through a smart phone app and QR codes.

3   Information about learning opportunities

Summary

The information about learning opportunities produced by the University **meets UK expectations**. The intended audience finds that the information about the learning opportunities offered is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

3.1   The University's website is well designed and provides tailored information for a range of stakeholders, including students, parents and advisers, and the wider public, including potential employers, clients, partners and staff. Key strategies and policies are available online, including the Strategic Plan and the Annual Operating and Financial Review, together with prospectuses. More detailed information on structures, officers, values and codes of practice are available via a Guide to Publication scheme. The full range of procedures and regulations is available online, conveniently accessed through an Academic Guide. The Collaborative Partners register and Student Charter are examples of other key documents accessible to the public.

3.2   For prospective students there is clear and detailed information on admissions which makes reference to offer conditions and special considerations, including appeals. PSRB requirements are made clear on course web pages, with a good explanation of selection processes. Programme web pages outline broadly the programme structure, entry

requirements and module content in a manner suitably tailored to the intended audience, although there is variability in the depth of module information. A good level of information is provided on pastoral support and student services, together with pages giving financial information on fees and living costs. A Parent's Guide to Higher Education at Swansea University helpfully defines specialist jargon and includes frequently asked questions.

3.3 The Marketing Department signs off all information targeted at prospective students. The prospectuses are updated annually and local changes collated by the Marketing Department before proofs are shared with Admissions, Professional Services and colleges, which each have marketing managers responsible for information sign-off. Partner information is checked for accuracy at each stage of validation and periodic review. A well structured system is in operation for monitoring overseas recruitment materials and information for prospective students on partners' websites has recently been audited (see paragraph 2.11.4).

3.4 KIS data is accessible via the Unistats website or by means of a widget on programme pages and complies with relevant HEFCW circulars, for instance in making clear accommodation and any additional costs of study. The data is managed appropriately, with information extracted from stored module descriptors which colleges can then view and update. Following verification, senior institutional staff sign off the data set as a whole and there are robust systems for auditing.

3.5 Post-offer information is sent to successful applicants on open days and regular emails keep students informed. An Arrivals Planning Group coordinates the information, and from 2014 individual colleges will have induction landing pages to collate enrolment information.

3.6 For current students, the website provides information on regulations, academic and support services and study abroad. These are supplemented by college and programme-specific information which students confirmed is useful. An intranet portal provides staff with links to management information and systems, and students with links to services, but most programme-level information is provided through the VLE. Some information is automatically populated, but assessment guidelines, marking criteria, sample papers and pre-lecture materials must be added by staff, who admitted that compliance with new University requirements in this respect is sometimes a work in progress. Students confirmed that the VLE have improved over time. They consider handbooks to be a useful source of information. Some external examiner reports are available via the VLE but mostly they must be accessed through student representatives. They will be shared more broadly with the student body in future and steps are already in place to enable this.

3.7 For students on collaborative programmes there are additional handbooks whose accuracy is verified by link tutors. For international students, the web pages are available in several languages, with clear information on English language and country-specific entry requirements.

3.8 The University has a well established procedure for issuing transcripts on completion of awards, involving a review of accuracy at a number of levels. The University is at the forefront of implementing the sector-wide Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) which records both academic and extracurricular activity contributing to personal and professional development, such as volunteering and the achievement of employability awards. The Students' Union is also working on a Student Union Award. Good information is available online for students about what can be recorded on the HEAR.

3.9 The University operates an Information Code of Practice and uses templates widely to ensure colleges and programmes populate programme information, much of it centrally generated, alongside consistent central policies. The accuracy of information is monitored

through processes at each level and effectively audited. The review team investigated how accuracy of information is ensured in a number of categories of programme information.

3.10 The University maintains an electronic Module Catalogue which has been subject to reviews and spot-checks since 2012 to reduce inaccuracies (see paragraph 1.1.2). Despite the ongoing need for refinement, the review team believes that an appropriate amount of module level information is available to students. However, the review team identified inconsistencies in information about moderation, which appeared contrary to the University's strong commitment to publicising moderation methodologies to students (see paragraph 1.3.4).

3.11 The University's Code of Practice for Quality Assurance requires programme specifications to be used as the definitive source of information about programmes and commits to making the version preserved in its electronic database available online to stakeholders. However, discussions with staff and documentary evidence revealed a lack of clarity about whether the definitive version is what appeared in Programme Handbooks or whether these contain a broadly equivalent representation of the definitive information in a form suitable for students. In practice, the review team found a good deal of variation, particularly around the citing of subject benchmark statements and situating programmes in the FHEQ, both in historical information from programme review documentation and in the current intranet Course Catalogue. The review team acknowledges that during 2012-13 the University identified the central management and accuracy of programme information as a weakness and has been taking steps to improve this and align with its own Code of Practice. However, some of these actions are very recent or, indeed, ongoing. Therefore, it **affirms** the steps taken to monitor and improve the accuracy and completeness of definitive programme information.

3.12 The University's Welsh Language Scheme indicates its commitment to parity between English and Welsh, promoted by the Academi Hywel Teifi but with each college and professional service responsible for local implementation. A monitoring group reports to the Use of Welsh Committee and on to Senate. The University produces an annual report to the Welsh Language Commissioner and the latest of these suggests that the University is meeting its obligations in most respects or has active plans to do so.

4   Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at Swansea University **is commended**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1 The University's Strategic Plan and Learning Strategy demonstrate a strategic, high-level approach to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities that is deliberate and continual across a number of themes: research-led and practice-driven learning and teaching; increased student mobility; curriculum innovation; learner support; retention and success; employability, entrepreneurship and professional development. The review team found that staff they met, while they may not have articulated enhancement in such strategic terms, clearly identified specific examples of institutional initiatives and displayed deep awareness of overarching structures such as the four University Academies. Although these have evolved organically, the University has identified successful aspects of their operations and extended them to cover further parts of the institution's provision. The review team concludes, therefore, that not only does the University have a strategic approach to enhancement, but that this has momentum and its ethos was disseminated effectively to staff and students.

4.2   The majority of Senate's senior committees have enhancement built into their terms of reference. The central body relating to learning and teaching enhancement is the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) which brings together chairs of CLTCs to drive enhancement initiatives. The review team saw documentary evidence of its practice in receiving updates on strategies and reports from working groups. The Academies report to LTC, with the Swansea Academy of Learning and Teaching (SALT), the Swansea Employability Academy (SEA) and the Swansea Academy of Inclusivity and Learner Support (SAILS) all being standing items on the agenda. Evidence also shows that LTC takes initiatives and drives policies, such as personal tutoring, the standardisation of VLE content, and assessment and feedback through to implementation. There is also evidence that LTC facilitates discussion of, for instance, university-wide performance indicators, retention statistics, NSS action plans and digests of external examiner reports, and updates policies or starts an enhancement initiative in response. There is also evidence that it identifies good practice and actions for the Academies to research into or disseminate.

4.3   Minutes of the CLTCs confirm that Academies' champions in the colleges are able to disseminate initiatives downwards and obtain feedback, and that Boards of Study operationalised enhancements begun in the Academies or LTC and considered peer observation outcomes for good practice to feed upwards.

4.4   Quality assurance mechanisms, including Annual Programme Review (APR), Periodic Programme Review (PPR) and Programme Approval, are all used to identify good practice. The Academy Registry collates APR and PPR reports and passes them to the Academies to inform future projects and action planning. Documentation shows that Academic Boards often have an agenda item dedicated to sharing good practice, for instance from the aggregate external examiner reports, and the review team heard that peer observation, which is supported by SALT, is genuinely embraced by colleagues who also felt that moving to the college structure had increased opportunities to share good practice.

4.5   Student feedback is used consistently as a driver of enhancement. Aligned to the Learning and Teaching Strategy is an Annual Student Experience Report and Action Plan which can draw on a range of feedback, including the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the NSS. An extremely thorough analysis in response to the NSS, in particular, results in sound action planning and targeted resource which the review team was able to trace through institutional processes and link to interventions. The team gained the impression from staff of a high level responsiveness to feedback data generally, with numerous examples at central and local levels of engagements with students changing practices. For instance, an Assessment Working Group, established in reaction to poor NSS results, brought about tighter controls on turnaround, more diverse assessment, minimum standards of feedback and the roll-out of compulsory online marking from autumn 2014. The integration of feedback data into enhancement structures contributes to the good practice identified in paragraph 2.3.5.

4.6   A particularly powerful example of an enhancement process is the Student Experience Engagement. Superseding the Cause for Concern scheme, this intervention can focus on academic areas which score particularly well against key performance indicators, in the interests of sharing good practice, as well as those performing poorly and requiring an action plan. Student representatives confirmed their involvement in such reviews and cited improvements that had resulted. The review team heard many times that staff and students regard enhancement as a partnership activity. They gave examples of work to improve communications and link services such as Careers with the work of student societies. There is also evidence that the University has sought to enhance its representative and feedback structures, for instance in appointing a University Student Feedback Officer. The involvement of undergraduate students as partners in the development of enhancement initiatives is **good practice**.

4.7   Students are also active participants in the four cross-institutional Academies which each drive an element of the Strategic Plan and Learning and Teaching Strategy, with priorities informed in part by the outcomes of quality assurance reports. Academies operate on a 'hub-and-spoke' model to focus funds on projects rather than administration, driving their initiatives both cross-institutionally and through 'champions' who sit on CLTCs to disseminate information, plan the delivery of projects locally and feed good practice back into the Academies. Champions met by the review team are committed to their roles and feel they are flexible enough to evolve naturally and provide a potential career path based on enhancement. Teaching staff are very complimentary about Champions and describe an ethos of enhancement developing out of the Academy structures.

4.8   Academies have interlinked strategies, can work together on projects and hold 'joint-badged' events. The review team heard of SEA and SALT collaboration that had impacted on the personal tutoring system and on assessment. They also work with other cross-institutional committees and the review team heard about the Learning Innovation Group, a collection of chairs of CLTCs and SALT Champions, including the embedded college ICWS, and one of its outcomes, the programme 'Make One Change' which encourages academics to adopt one innovative practice matched to NSS outcomes.

4.9   As part of its particular focus, SALT runs the annual Learning and Teaching Conference and the student-nominated Excellence in Learning and Teaching and Excellence in Student Support Awards. It also provides small funding opportunities for teaching development, supports applications for external awards, gives opportunities for student research internships, and runs enhancement seminars on pedagogic practice, with the associated web pages being an excellent resource. Staff gave specific examples of SALT helping to improve their assessment practice. SALT engages closely with the Higher Education Academy (HEA), holding joint conferences, directing staff to HEA information and opportunities, and receiving funding for a project on inclusive assessment, research which was translated into continuing professional development and online resources. SALT's activities contribute to the feature of good practice described in paragraph 2.2.3.

4.10   SEA coordinates and stimulates enhancement initiatives on employability, working with the Careers, College and Professional Services. Its Board has a broad membership for stakeholders and employers and takes in regional strategies. SEA coordinates the Swansea Employability Award, which is recorded on the HEAR and includes an employability module and 'life experience'. It is also associated with a range of other awards in volunteering, sustainability and internationalisation. The Academy is responsible for the Swansea Paid Internships Network, with its excellent supporting materials, and the Week of Work. Student representatives are very positive about these initiatives and have been involved in their development. Employability champions gave examples of support they have given to reviewing curriculum intended learning outcomes and starting 'mini' academies in the colleges, identifying employment opportunities for each programme. More generally (as described in paragraph 2.7.1) the University has made significant investment in its Careers Service. The work of SEA contributes to the good practice described in paragraph 2.2.3.

4.11   SAILS is directed both to widening access and enhancing student academic and pastoral support, working with HEA and partners such as the Regional Learning Partnership and Reaching Wider Partnership. Its retention strategy embraces pre-university engagement, extended induction, enhanced feedback, learner and pastoral support and the early identification of those at risk of not progressing. It also has a role in monitoring access and retention data, which has recently improved considerably, and the review team saw evidence that the retention strategy is being disseminated to college level. The outreach activities of SAILS includes Welsh language taster events in schools and offers University students teaching opportunities through taster sessions in the community.

4.12   The Academi Hywel Teifi (AHT) is responsible for promoting Welsh-medium learning opportunities across the University. The context for some of its work on English-Welsh parity is discussed in paragraph 3.12. Beyond this particular work, AHT is contributing to enhancement in a number of ways. The review team learned from staff of considerable progress made in the number of modules available through the medium of Welsh, with 369 students now studying in the language and opportunities across most colleges. AHT encourages staff to teach in Welsh, offering 14 lectureships through Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, and staff confirmed that the wider college structures had enabled provision to spread.

4.13   The work of SEA, SALT, SAILS and AHT in the development, evaluation and dissemination of good projects that enhance students' wider learning experience is **good practice**.

4.14   The University is enhancing student experience and employability by actively encouraging them to study or work abroad during their degree programmes. The strategy has been to spread the practice beyond language degrees and explicitly to combat graduate unemployment and is in line with the Welsh Government's Internationalisation strategy. The results, from a low base, are extremely encouraging. To increase capacity, the University has cultivated a small number of partnerships which it plans to deepen, possibly with Joint Degrees. This has be facilitated by a number of technical measures, including the Curriculum Reform and Innovation Project which reviewed the structure of programmes and resulted in a move to semesterisation to allow study abroad, international placements and intercalary years without disadvantage. A further measure is the extension of the Languages for All initiative to programmes beyond arts and humanities. Staff are aware of, and engaged in, these initiatives and cited them as an instance of deliberate enhancement in the strategic aim to reorient the University experience around graduate attributes. The contribution of mobility and internationalisation initiatives to students' personal and career development is **good practice**.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions. More information can be found in the *Institutional Review Wales: Handbook*, available on our website at: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Pages/Information-And-Guidance-Details.aspx?PubID=123.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary.

Academic Infrastructure Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

academic standards The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Code of practice *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

credit(s) A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

enhancement Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

feature of good practice A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

framework A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

framework for higher education qualifications A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

learning opportunities The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

learning outcome What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to

demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

operational definition A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

programme specifications Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

public information Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements, along with additional topics and overarching themes.

subject benchmark statement A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

threshold academic standard The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

widening participation Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.