Quality Enhancement Review

Cardiff Metropolitan University

Technical Report

January 2021

Contents

About the Quality Enhancement Review method

The QAA website explains the method for [Quality Enhancement Review (QER)](#) and has links to the QER handbook and other informative documents.[1] You can also find more information about the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).](#)[2]

About this review

This is the Technical Report of the QER conducted by QAA at Cardiff Metropolitan University. The Review Visit was originally scheduled to take place during May 2020. This was after the national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the Review Visit being postponed. In discussion with the University and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, the review visit was rescheduled firstly to take place in December 2020 and then on 18-25 January 2021. QAA made some amendments to the QER process to accommodate the ongoing pandemic, most notable of which was that the review visit was conducted entirely online. The review was conducted by a team of five reviewers:

- Professor John Baldock
- Ms Tessa Counsell
- Professor Diane Meehan
- Dr Osian Rees
- Mr Matthew Kitching (student reviewer).

In advance of the review visits, the provider submitted a self-evaluative document (the Self-evaluative Analysis), a change report, a Prior Information Pack - comprising a range of materials about the provider's arrangements for managing quality and academic standards - and, in October 2020, a Change Report Update.

About this report

In this report, the QER team makes judgements on:

- the requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) Part 1 for internal quality assurance
- the relevant baseline requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework in Wales.

The judgements can be found on page 2, followed by the detailed findings of the review given in numbered paragraphs.

Technical Reports set out the QER team's view under each of the report headings. A shorter Outcome Report sets out the main findings of the QER for a wider audience. The [Outcome Report](#) for this review is on the QAA website.[3]

QER Technical Reports are intended primarily for the provider reviewed, and to provide an information base for the production of thematic reports that identify findings across several providers.

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[1] About QER: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/quality-enhancement-review
[2] About QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus
[3] Outcome Report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/Cardiff-Metropolitan-University

Overarching judgement about Cardiff Metropolitan University

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

- Cardiff Metropolitan University meets the requirements of the ESG Part 1 for internal quality assurance.
- Cardiff Metropolitan University meets the relevant baseline regulatory requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales.

This is a positive judgement, which means the provider has robust arrangements for securing academic standards, managing academic quality and for enhancing the quality of the student experience

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

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

1   The University can trace its origins back to 1865 when the School of Art first opened in the Old Free Library in Cardiff. During the 20th century, a number of Cardiff colleges - specialising in teacher training, technology, nautical studies, commerce and food technology - merged to form 'South Glamorgan' and then Cardiff Institute of Higher Education which, in 1996, was renamed the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). UWIC secured research degree awarding powers in 2009. Following the dissolution of the University of Wales, the University was renamed Cardiff Metropolitan University (Cardiff Met/CMU) in 2011.

2   The University regards itself as a global university rooted in Wales with the purpose of delivering high-quality and high-impact, practice-focused and professionally-recognised education to students from around the globe. Its vision is 'to enable every student to fulfil their full potential to make outstanding graduate-level contributions and generate sustainable economic growth and social cohesion for Cardiff, Wales and the wider world'. The current strategic plan includes a programme of seven priorities, supported by enabling strategies, based on its four Core Values of Innovation, Creativity, Freedom and Diversity.

3   The University's academic portfolio concentrates on practice-focused and professionally-recognised provision across art and design, education and public services, business and management, sport and health sciences, and digital, data and design technologies, including a provision in the Welsh medium which it continues to grow. Programmes are developed to align with the University's research, innovation and enterprise objectives and to meet student demand and employer need.

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

4   Cardiff Met is structured into five academic schools: Cardiff School of Art and Design (CSAD); Cardiff School of Education and Social Policy (CSESP); Cardiff School of Management (CSM); Cardiff School of Sport and Health Sciences (CSSHS); and Cardiff School of Technologies (CST). In 2018-19, the University had enrolled a total of 19,992 students. 10,663 students (9,153 FTE) were Wales-based of whom 173 students were studying at partner institutions within Wales. The University also had 9,329 students based in 17 partner institutions outside Wales. Undergraduate students constitute 80% of enrolments, with 19% of students enrolled on postgraduate taught degrees and the remaining 1% on research degrees. Full-time students comprise 86% of enrolments and part-time students account for the remaining 14%.

5   The University has a strong widening access profile with 40% of its population from the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD40). CMU monitors all aspects of retention and progression including better intelligence through data dashboards and scheduled reporting to relevant committees.

1.3 Commentary on how the provider supports national priorities

6   The University is addressing the series of 'national measures' identified by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). The 2018-19 Fees Plan articulates the tuition fees for its provision and is framed in the context of providing targeted support to ensure a level playing field for learners and potential hard-to-reach learners from groups

underrepresented in higher education, including those with protected characteristics and those who have experienced socioeconomic and/or geographic disadvantage, particularly in areas of economic disadvantage in South Wales. Student experience, including enhancing the student journey, is a key focus; increasing the number of students studying through the medium of Welsh is a strategic goal. Employability is a strategic priority and CMU offers strong support for entrepreneurship, embedded within the curriculum and strengthened by input from the Centre for Entrepreneurship located on its Llandaff Campus.

7   The University is particularly focused on addressing local and global challenges by contributing to the development of inclusive economic growth and a sustainable environment for future generations in line with the *Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*.

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

8   Following an initial lead by the Senior Quality Advisor in the Quality Enhancement Directorate (QED), the University established a Project Board led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student Engagement) working in partnership through monthly meetings with the Students' Union and the Student Voice and Engagement Lead. CMU adopted a collegial approach to the preparation of documentation and the Change Report was written by a consultant with input from key members of staff.

9   The University asked the review team to consider five areas of focus, selected to reflect areas of current and future enhancement: Student Engagement, and Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility (both drawing upon the University's eponymous thematic strategy); and Partnership (drawing in part from CMU's *Looking Out International Strategy).* Two further areas of focus had been chosen by the University as areas where there were identified challenges: The Use of Data to Drive Quality; and Graduate Employability.

1.5   Brief summary of the nature and rationale for the particular areas of focus of the review in the self-evaluation

10   The University proposed five areas of focus, selected to reflect areas of enhancement at different levels of development: Student Engagement; Partnership; Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility; The Use of Data to Drive Quality; and Graduate Employability.

11   Student engagement is a key focus of the University's strategic plan. CMU is committed to investment in the student journey to enhance its student experience through a focus on improving learning, teaching and student support on campus, reaching out to its partner colleges in Wales and integrating its global partners. Partnership is an essential element in the Strategic Plan and CMU engages with a number of partners that are seen as crucial to achieving its transnational education, research, civic engagement, community development and innovation ambitions. Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility is a key CMU strength, the strategy based on four pillars: being at the heart of the community; transforming lives; empowering active citizens; and growth and prosperity.

12   Two further areas of focus were chosen as areas where there were identified challenges. While data systems at CMU are regarded as mature and well-understood, the University seeks to enable staff and students to benefit from a holistic view of the data that is available across the institution to enhance decision-making and as a vehicle for enhancement. The University is developing its Graduate Employability agenda to enable students to better understand their transferable skill sets and to expand knowledge about opportunities available to them beyond their degree subject and beyond the local and traditional labour markets.

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

13   The previous QAA institutional review (hybrid model) in 2014 resulted in five recommendations and a number of areas of good practice. The University developed an Action Plan in consultation with staff and the Student Union (SU) Executive Officers. This was monitored through the then Academic Quality and Standards Board (AQSB) and the updated plan was signed off by the SU and the Vice-Chancellor in May 2015. The following actions were taken.

14   The first recommendation was to ensure that policies and guidance for formative assessment feedback include equitable treatment of draft coursework assignments in all taught provision. The University, through its Quality Assurance Action Group (QAAG) which includes student representation, identified an equitable process which was approved by the then Learning and Teaching Board (LTB), following which the relevant modifications were made to the University's Assessment and Feedback Policy and the *Academic Handbook, Volume 1 Section 4.* Guidance was also developed and issued to staff in the University and in collaborative partnerships. The changes were approved through AQSB.

15   The second recommendation called for a review and clarification of complaints procedures for collaborative provision and to ensure that these are consistently and accurately communicated to students. Relevant documentation was updated to ensure consistency across publications such as handbooks and other documentation relating to complaints, and moderators and link tutors were tasked with monitoring the accuracy and consistency of the information provided. Notwithstanding these actions, the review team found that further clarity is still required to ensure that all partner staff and students can readily access and fully understand the University's procedures (see paragraph 111).

16   The third recommendation was to apply a consistent university-wide approach to the training, support and monitoring of postgraduate research students (PGRs) engaged in teaching and assessment. Initially a training framework was developed and disseminated; this identified core and optional requirements for PGRs undertaking teaching. Subsequently, the University developed a policy on PGRs who teach, dated November 2019. The review team found that further clarity is needed to ensure that all PGRs who engage in teaching are trained (see paragraph 38).

17   The fourth recommendation was to ensure that all collaborative and articulation arrangements were covered by completed, signed and current inter-institutional agreements. The University ensured that the outstanding documentation was signed and archived and that monitoring processes were made more rigorous. The final recommendation was to ensure the clarity of formal documentation with regard to articulation arrangements. In response to this recommendation the parameters for articulation were clarified and training provided for relevant staff. The review team found these actions to be appropriate.

1.7 Details of the provider's responsibilities for the higher education it provides on behalf of the degree-awarding bodies it works with

18   The University has its own degree awarding powers. It also delivers higher national diploma provision under licence from Pearson and submits an Annual Institution Review Report (IRR); reports submitted for 2017-18 and 2018-19 identified no issues.

2 Enhancing the student learning experience

2.1 Strategic approach to enhancing the student experience

19   The provider's approach to enhancing the student experience is governed by its Student Engagement Strategy. The Strategy was created in 2018 and is closely aligned with the institution's overarching Strategic Plan and the objectives of the Fee and Access Plan. The Strategy is designed to promote three core aims - strengthening partnership working with students; embedding a student-centred approach to service delivery; enhancing the physical, social, cultural and recreational environment - and is structured into four thematic areas: curriculum, portfolio, co-curriculum and environment. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student Engagement) is responsible for overseeing the Strategy's implementation. A network of key staff and university teams, including the Quality Enhancement Directorate (QED) and Associate Deans for Student Engagement (ADSEs), work closely with the Students' Union and are critical to the strategy's implementation.

20   The Strategy is underpinned by the Student Engagement Policy which was approved in 2019, following a consultation period with staff and students. The Policy contains seven guiding principles for student engagement including: that the University's approach will focus on success; all taught programmes will include equitable engagement opportunities for all; student engagement data will be used to support student learning; and regular contact will be maintained with each student. The team found that the University is making good progress with respect to student engagement and is on a positive trajectory. Work against the principles in certain areas - for instance, induction and personal tutoring - is well developed and viewed positively by students. The University also acknowledges that despite the progress there is more to be done - for example, surrounding the use of data, which was an area of development identified as part of this review, and that perspective is supported by the findings of the team (see Section 4.6).

21   In addition to the enhancements surrounding personal tutoring, induction and collaboration over the Student Engagement Policy, other examples of a student-centred approach to service delivery provided by the University, include co-design of curriculum through the programme development and approval processes and the development of learner analytics and personalised timetabling.

22   A Student Charter is also in place, which outlines university and student commitments with respect to the learning community, student voice, support and wellbeing, communication, and personal and professional development. With respect to communication, student representatives commented that policy development could involve a broader range of students and improvements could also be made in terms of closing the feedback loop - for instance, surrounding module evaluation. Overall, however, the team found that the strategic framework for enhancing the student experience was appropriate, included significant consultation with students, and was regularly reviewed.

2.2 Approach to working in partnership with students

23   In addition to being a core aim within the Student Engagement Strategy, the University's commitment to working in partnership with students is also detailed in the Relationship Agreement between the institution and the Students' Union. The Agreement stresses the importance of the strategic partnership between the two organisations and of adopting a student-centred approach. The Relationship Agreement also acknowledges the likelihood of the University and Union holding different opinions and the need to discuss these with respect, understanding, openness and trust. Students, staff and governors agreed that the partnership is overwhelmingly conducted in line with those values. Furthermore, students and governors were positive about the open and constructive dialogue that exists

between students and the governing body, helping to ensure that decisions are taken based on a sound understanding of the student experience.

24   The institution has a range of committees and reviews which involve students, including Student-Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs), Annual Programme Reviews (APR) and Validation; and Periodic Review panels. Its approach to its partnership with students in managing the quality of learning is summarised in its Student Participation in Quality Processes Policy which sets out the broad approach to student participation in quality processes. Students participating in panels are sourced through the Students' Union and appointed by the Quality Enhancement Directorate. The number of panellists has grown modestly since 2018-19.

25   The team was provided with numerous other examples of collaboration with students including over the Time to Change Wales pledge, creation of the Student Charter, the Student-led Teaching Awards, Peer Assisted Learning Scheme (PALs) and MetVoice Week, which gathered feedback from 1600 students and informed discussions between the Students' Union and the Associate Deans for Student Engagement (ADSEs).

26   The appointment of Associate Deans for Student Engagement (ADSEs) in each school, whose remit is to direct and manage the implementation of processes and procedures to deliver student engagement, is a recent development. The team found that the introduction of ADSEs within each school has strengthened the partnership between the University and the Students' Union. Student representatives reported that the creation of the post had produced clearer lines of communication, enabled timely responses and, in particular, supported engagement and the student experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The team, therefore, **commends** the strong contribution made by the Associate Deans Student Engagement (ADSEs) in consolidating student engagement and partnership between students and the University.

27   Following the establishment of the ADSE posts, a Student Voice Group has also been introduced bringing together the Associate Deans, Students' Union, QED and University Communications. The Group reviews minutes of SSLCs to identify common themes and reviews survey data and other forms of student feedback. The institution measures its progress in this area through its annual Partnership Report, submitted to the Learning, Teaching and Student Engagement Committee. The report itself is a collaboration between the Quality Enhancement Directorate and Students' Union and provides an overview of joint projects and activity such as student contribution to Quality Enhancement Review, PALs, MetVoice Week and the SU Partner Event.

2.3   Recognising and responding to diversity of the student population, including approaches to widening access, the needs of specific groups of students and by mode, level and location of study

28   The University's approach to widening access is set out in the Fee and Access Plan. Specifically, the Widening Access team target learners from the bottom two quintiles of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD40), and in particular students from a range of minority and disadvantaged backgrounds, including ex-offenders, refugees and asylum seekers, young males from low participation areas, students with protected characteristics and students from certain black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. Recruitment of students from low participation neighbourhoods has been consistently above Welsh and UK averages.

29   In order to support the University's widening access work, a broad range of related programmes have been created. These include Community to Campus: an established programme of courses working to engage adult learners without Level 4 qualifications, a free

two-week Summer School to coincide with Adult Learners' Week, preparatory courses for refugee and asylum seekers seeking to take International English Language Testing System Courses (IELTS), and a partnership with HMP Prescoed which involves the delivery of two accredited modules in the prison and working with carers and care leavers by linking with partner organisations to offers courses for carers.

30   In order to complement the University's work in supporting a diverse student population, the Students' Union has expanded its representation structure through the recruitment of five new part-time roles, covering the key themes of Equality and Diversity, Health and Wellbeing, International Students and Welsh Language. There is now a SU Environmental Part-Time Officer. Students are positive about the support they receive from the Union and, in particular, university support services. The institution has taken a number of steps to enhance the operation of the personal tutoring systems and students recognised this as a strength, especially in terms of tutors' accessibility. Students confirmed to the team that support for international students, where the University has performed consistently well in the International Student Barometer Survey, is comprehensive. The English Language Training Centre (ELTC) supports approximately 300 students per year. International students are also provided with a tour of Cardiff and, along with other students, an SU Toolkit and a guide entitled 'What to Know Before you Go'. The Cardiff Met Sanctuary Award supports asylum seekers in providing a full fee waiver, bus pass and daily lunch voucher, together with personalised support.

31   In response to challenges recruiting part-time students, the University has established a Centre for Work-Based Learning (CWBL) and a framework for Recognition of Prior Learning that is designed to increase the institution's capacity to recruit students wishing to study while remaining in full-time work. The University also intends to pursue a more regional strategy that will enable students to progress into and through the institution.

32   The University has identified a particular need to give greater prominence and attention to the interests of students and potential learners from BAME backgrounds. This will involve ensuring that, where necessary, changes are made to process and practice to ensure that BAME students are as likely as students from other demographic groups to participate and succeed in higher education. At the time of the review, the University had established the data concerning student achievement and attainment gaps but was still in the process of planning and implementing action to address the issue. As noted elsewhere in the report (see section 4), the review team recognises the importance of continued progress in the use of data to identify and address issues.

33   The team found that the diversity of the student population had been taken into account in the University's comprehensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was seen as a priority that no students were disadvantaged, and the University worked with the Students' Union to ensure student opinion was prominent in decision-making, which had been valued by the SU. For instance, the institution sought to rapidly distribute HEFCW recovery funds to address digital poverty and provide access to computer hardware. Evidence suggests this has had a positive impact as surveys show a 10% improvement in the number of students who considered they had access to the right resources between June and October 2020.

34   Notwithstanding the positive trajectory of student engagement already identified by the team (see section 2.1), challenges do persist in relation to engagement with students studying at collaborative partner locations. While the University requires systems and processes to be comparable at partner institutions, and the Students' Union provide a range of support measures for partner students, engagement is variable. None of the students the team met from partner colleges who were student representatives, had received training from the University or attended the SU Partner Event, which 11 students from a variety of

transnational education (TNE) partners attended in 2020. The University acknowledges that support to partner representatives is variable and recognises that further improvements are required. The team, therefore, **recommends** that arrangements for supporting student representation in partner institutions are applied consistently and effectively.

2.4   Postgraduate taught and research student experience

35   The institution has a range of mechanisms in place to gather feedback about the postgraduate student experience. These include external and internal surveys and student representation on University and School Research Degrees Committees, Research and Innovation Committee and the University Ethics Committee. Student engagement structures for postgraduate taught students replicate those for undergraduates. Students confirmed to the team that they feel able to provide feedback and that their opinions are listened to and acted upon.

36   In line with feedback from the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), taught and research students were positive about the support they receive from the University. In particular, library provision was praised and research students stated that they felt actively encouraged to participate in research groups, attend seminars and present their work. The University sets out requirements for supervision in the Research Degrees Code of Practice and communicates these to students through the PGR Student Handbook. The University requires at least six supervisory meetings to be held each year. In practice, students reported that there is considerable flexibility when it comes to scheduling meetings and, in most instances, the student directs the form and number of supervisory sessions based on their needs.

37   Results for the 2018 PTES showed higher levels of satisfaction across all thematic areas compared to 2017. The University was ranked in the second quartile overall and responses for skills development, assessment and information were especially positive, compared to the UK average. Results in the 2020 PRES were largely positive. Overall satisfaction increased to 90% (80.8% in 2019) and satisfaction improved across all areas within the survey. However, satisfaction with 'research culture', although it had increased by 5% to 58%, remains low at 2.5% below the sector average. This has contributed to efforts to make more resources available for research students. An online Doctoral Academy has been launched during the coronavirus pandemic, bringing together a series of resources in a single location. The repository is complemented by virtual writing retreats, live events and a daily drop-in session. Students viewed the new academy as a positive development but considered that even more could be done. Similarly, the University recognises the importance of doing more to foster a research culture, especially for students undertaking niche PhDs, where a less structured community exists, and informed the team about aspirations to expand the current Doctoral Academy into a full doctoral college that could serve as a one-stop shop. The team, therefore, **affirms** the steps being taken to further develop and expand the current doctoral academy in order to strengthen the postgraduate research community.

38   In November 2019, the University approved a Code of Practice for the recruitment, support and training of postgraduate research students who teach. The Code of Practice outlines a series of compulsory corporate training modules, mandatory workshops on students' rights and reflective practice, as well as a 20-credit module on Teaching and Learning Support and an academic induction. The Code of Practice states that this training should be completed immediately and, ideally, prior to commencing role-related activities. However, the team found that postgraduate research students had engaged in teaching without undertaking training and had supported online delivery without specific training. The team, therefore, **recommends** that the University ensures that all postgraduate research

students who teach undertake appropriate formal training before taking responsibility for teaching including specific training for online delivery where appropriate.

2.5   Supporting students in their development as learners

39   The University introduced an Enhanced Induction Programme in 2016-17, with the objective of enhancing the pre-arrival and induction experience of students. An Induction Handbook was developed in 2017-18, including guidance for programme teams on designing induction programmes. Students, including international students, with whom the review team met with during the review visit, described the induction arrangements as helpful and effective. Induction arrangements were changed for the 2020-21 academic year as a result of the pandemic. Induction was designed as a three-day virtual event. Guidance for Personal Tutors for Induction 2020 was introduced, as well as a Student Transition Welcome project, where new students take part in an online call with existing students who have received training, and can provide advice and signposting to relevant sources of support.

40   All students have access to a personal tutor. Students are allocated a personal tutor during their induction period, and this person will normally remain their tutor during their studies. Following previous inconsistency in practice, the University developed a new Enhanced Personal Tutoring Policy and Scheme in 2017. The policy includes a set of guiding principles, a section on student entitlement and responsibilities, and details relating to the role and responsibilities of personal tutors. Personal tutors have access to the Learner Analytics dashboard, which has relevant data including student engagement with the VLE, ratified grades, library loans and notes. Academic staff the review team met with during the review visit emphasised the value of this data in performing their personal tutor roles. There are plans to expand the data in the future, to include, for example, unratified VLE grades, attendance monitoring and notifications of student non-engagement. Students met by the review team were highly positive about their experiences of the personal tutor system, highlighting, for example, the ease with which a meeting with a personal tutor can be arranged using the University's app. It was suggested that the system has been further strengthened as a result of the University's response to the pandemic.

41   It was apparent to the review team that there has been an improvement in assessment feedback since the last review, a factor highlighted by an improvement in the relevant National Student Survey (NSS) scores. There is an Enhanced Assessment and Feedback Policy, which was drawn up following consultation resulting from an investigation into inconsistency of practice. Students met by the review team were positive about the assessment feedback they receive. They confirmed that feedback is made available in a timely manner, and provides useful guidance in terms of preparing for subsequent assessments. Students also suggested that feedback has improved in terms of being more detailed as a result of steps taken in the light of the pandemic.

42   One particular initiative that was drawn to the attention of the review team over the course of the review visit, was the introduction of the Cardiff Met 'Ethical, Digital, Global and Entrepreneurial' (EDGE) framework. This is described as a new model of delivery which enables students to develop ethical, digital, global and entrepreneurial skills, experience, knowledge, confidence and resilience in addition to their subject-specialist knowledge. Cardiff Met's Corporate Strategy and Student Engagement Strategy both explicitly reference EDGE as a core element of the student experience. Accordingly, EDGE has been mapped against graduate competencies, and is taken into consideration when validating new programmes, and also during periodic review of existing provision. In this respect, embedding EDGE has been described as a rolling process.

43   It was apparent to the review team from reviewing relevant documentation and hearing the views of staff, students and members of the governing body, that EDGE is viewed as a positive strategic development. However, evidence heard by the review team suggested that while it was well-embedded into the curriculum, there was a varying level of awareness among students, and it appeared that visibility varies on a programme-by-programme basis. With this in mind, the review team would encourage the University to promote the approach so that all students are aware of it.

44   The University has introduced a number of mechanisms to support students during the pandemic. This includes a No Detriment (Safety Net) Policy 201b. A COVID-19 support fund has been established to make awards to provide immediate relief to students experiencing hardship, including international students. The University offers online counselling services with an online appointment system for counselling services. A mechanism has been created to provide refuge for students experiencing domestic violence, and students who are self-isolating have been approached by the University and offered support. Students met by the review team spoke positively about the support they have received during the pandemic, emphasising that lecturers have been contactable and understanding of their difficulties. On a more general level, the review team was informed that the University's response has included the Students' Union as a partner in the decision-making process, and there is an expectation that this enhanced level of cooperation will continue into the future.

2.6   Learning environment provided, including the use of technology

45   Since the last QAA review in 2014, the University has invested over £40 million in its estate. This includes the establishment of the new Cardiff School of Technologies, which was launched in 2018. The University introduced an Estate Strategy in 2018, in order to set out how the development of the University's estate will support its Strategic Plan. Allied to the Estate Strategy, an Estates Masterplan has been produced setting out how the University's campuses will be developed up to 2032. A new governance structure for estate matters was introduced in autumn 2019, including the establishment of a University Environment and Estates Committee.

46   The University also introduced a Digital Strategy in 2018, to replace its previous Technology and Information Strategy. The Digital Strategy has the stated aim of setting out how making better use of digital places and practices will enable the University to achieve its strategic priorities. The Digital Strategy Committee has overall responsibility for the delivery of the Strategy.

47   The University changed its VLE platform in 2015. All programmes are expected to adhere to minimum standards for their programme VLE site, which includes the programme handbook, tutor information and contact details, lecture notes, electronic summative submission points and feedback on summative assessment. Students the review team met with during the review visit were generally positive about the effectiveness of how the VLE is used by the University. They did, nonetheless, highlight some issues, including interruption of service at inconvenient times due to maintenance, as well as some inconsistency of use. In addition, the review team was told that on some occasions, particularly following the move to blended learning as a result of the pandemic, some academic staff combine the use of different platforms, which can cause confusion. In late 2019, a Governance and Enhancement Project was initiated with the stated aim of establishing clear lines of process and governance in relation to student learning environments, including the VLE. As part of this project, a Governance Board has been established with representation from schools, professional services and the Students' Union, with a focus on enhancement.

48   Over the course of the review visit, the review team heard highly positive accounts of the support to the learning environment that is provided by the University's Library and Information Services. These accounts correspond to the high level of satisfaction with Learning Resources shown in the 2019 NSS Survey (88% satisfaction) and the 2019 PTES survey (84% satisfaction).

49   Students the review team met during the review visit were particularly positive of the role of Library and Information Services in providing an enhanced level of support in response to the pandemic. Examples of this support has included: a digital enquiry service; online helpdesk support; live online workshops; click-and-collect and postal book loans; additional e-book content; laptop loans; and support for the virtual fresher's fair. Library and Information Services are also involved in conversations about study space for the next stage of the pandemic response. In light of these factors, the review team **commends the particularly proactive approach of the Library and Information Services to further increase the level of support to students, especially during the pandemic.**

2.7   Supporting the Welsh medium student learning experience

50   The University's Student Charter sets out a commitment on the part of the University to work closely with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, and provide opportunities for students to study through the medium of Welsh. The University has a Welsh Language Unit, which supports academic schools in developing provision and support for Welsh-medium students, as well as ensuring compliance with the Welsh Language Standards. The University has established a Branch of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, and the Head of the Welsh Language Unit is the Branch Officer. The University has received Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol funding for academic staff and, more recently, there has been an emphasis on subject funding. Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol scholarships are available for students studying at least 40 credits a year in Welsh, and the University offers internal scholarships for students who study 20 credits in Welsh at Level 4.

51   There is a strategic commitment in the University's Strategic Plan to supporting the expansion of Welsh medium provision. This includes increasing student numbers, and the review team was informed that there are plans to strategically widen the range of programmes where study through the medium of Welsh is possible, with a view to directly increasing employability by producing graduates who are able to work through the medium of Welsh. Numbers of students studying 40 credits or more in Welsh are set out as a measure of success in the Strategic Plan, with a target of increasing numbers to 500 by 2022-23. The numbers grew from 216 in 2016-17 to 265 in 2018-19, but fell slightly to 222 in 2019-20. The review team was informed that an action plan is being produced in response to this aim, which will be considered and approved by the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol's Branch Committee at the University, before going on to the University's Combined Academic Board for approval during the 2020-21 academic year.

52   The review team heard positive accounts of the Welsh-medium student learning experience in meetings with students. Relatively small class sizes enable interactive learning, and students have a good level of contact with their lecturers. Submission of assessments in Welsh is possible, and feedback is provided in Welsh. One negative issue raised was that, in some modules, lecture slides are not always made available in Welsh in advance of classes due to the need for translation. The University is encouraged to achieve parity in this respect.

53   The review team also heard of positive experiences of the link between Welsh medium studies and work-based learning. It was apparent that there are good links between the University and employers offering placements for Welsh-medium students. Examples of cooperation include employers working with the University to encourage Welsh-medium

students to enter the field of education, along with joint initiatives to support employability.

2.8 Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience

54   The provider's approach to enhancing the student experience is governed by its Student Engagement Strategy, underpinned by its Student Engagement Policy. The University's approach to enhancing the student experience is student-centred and is effective; the strategic framework for enhancing the student experience is regularly reviewed and includes significant consultation with students. The role of the Associate Deans Student Engagement is key in consolidating student engagement across the University and the partnership with students. Complemented by the work of the Students' Union through its student representation structure, particular attention is paid to the needs of its diverse student population. This has been particularly evident in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The University has provided evidence of its support to students in their development as learners including a Personal Tutoring Policy ensuring consistency across the University, a Learning Analytics dashboard, and the development of EDGE (see paragraph 43) as core elements of the student experience. Library and IT services are commended for their proactive support. The review team noted the positive experiences of students studying through the medium of Welsh, including work-based learning in the fields of health and education.

3   Supporting the enhancement of learning and teaching

3.1 Strategic approach to forward planning, including the use of information to identify priorities designed to enhance learning and teaching, and approaches to implementation and evaluation

55   The University systematically uses a range of measures centred on the Strategic Plan 2017-18 to 2022-23, associated enabling strategies and Measures of Success to track annual progress relating to financial sustainability, student satisfaction, retention and outcomes, access, learning and teaching, research and innovation and staff. These are discussed at programme, school, university management and Board of Governor level in order to help the University inform its priorities. The University's strategic approach to forward planning is set out in a number of thematic strategy documents alongside the Strategic Plan.

56   Strategies are monitored by the Board of Governors, informed by regular formal reports from Management Board and Academic Board and by the SU Officers, Vice-Chancellor and other senior staff. There is a comprehensive range of documentation demonstrating the mapping process that has been undertaken to the ESG Part 1 and the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales.

57   The Strategic Plan links to a range of strategies designed to focus on key aspects - for example, the Research and Innovation Strategy, the Looking Out International Strategy, the Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility Strategy, People Strategy, Digital Strategy and the Finance Strategy. There are also clear links to all school strategies - for example, in the School of Management strategy there are stated links to financial stability, research and innovation, internationalisation and civic engagement. In addition, the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy ensures that the key foci of university-wide strategies are embedded in curricula, with links to professional standards and the skills of staff.

58   The review team met with senior staff, and members of the Board of Governors, who confirmed the use of a range of sources of data to evaluate performance and identify priorities designed to enhance learning and teaching.

59   The review team heard that performance against key performance indicators is monitored continuously, and indicators are updated annually, linked to the Programme Enhancement Plan (PEP) process, previously Annual Programme Review (APR). The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Student Engagement holds overall responsibility for quality enhancement, with Deputy Deans and Associate Deans for Student Engagement at school level. The Quality Enhancement Directorate (QED) supports schools in enhancement activities, ensuring staff are developed to deliver innovative teaching and enhance the student learning experience. The QED maintains a close relationship with the Students' Union in order to enhance the student experience, including through joint projects. The review team found that this is a particularly effective approach and **commends** the impact of the Quality Enhancement Directorate (QED) initiatives in ensuring the consistent management and enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience.

3.2   Approaches to managing change in approaches to learning and teaching

60   The review team found that the Student Engagement Strategy and Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy are fundamental adjuncts to the Strategic Plan in managing change in approaches to learning and teaching at the University, and ensuring ongoing enhancement. The Student Engagement Strategy identifies four strategic priorities: the curriculum, the portfolio, the co-curriculum and the environment. Central to the strategy is the Ethical, Digital, Global and Entrepreneurial (EDGE) framework - designed to embed development of these attributes through embedding in curricula, and designed and operating in conjunction with the Students' Union. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy provides a framework to enable the University to be responsive to the changing higher education environment and to demonstrate best practice in learning and teaching.

61   Student survey data are analysed proactively to manage effective and timely changes where appropriate. Reports on all surveys go to the Learning, Teaching and Student Engagement Committee, Management Board and the Board of Governors, with detailed commentary on how the University plans to react to the findings. Staff have found a learner analytics project to have considerably improved their ability to support students, by viewing student characteristics data alongside engagement with the library and the VLE, together with assessment outcomes.

62   The review team met with senior and teaching staff and students at the review visit. In addition to the documentation provided by the University, the team found that detailed and effective policies and processes are in place to monitor and evaluate learning and teaching. In particular, the University has an effective system of evaluating performance at programme level to form Programme Enhancement Plans (PEPs) on an annual basis - previously the Annual Programme Review. PEPs incorporate module evaluation reports, the student voice by means of programme representatives and external and internal surveys, and external examiner reports. PEPs are considered at school level before going to the QED and then into the reporting process at Management Board, Academic Board and the Board of Governors. Partner institution PEPs are formulated to the same specification as those on the University site and are also discussed at the Collaborative Provision Committee.

63   The QED ensures that all programmes, or groups of programmes, including those delivered at partner institutions, undergo Periodic Review every five years in order to ensure that all programmes remain current and in line with university strategies, policies and procedures. Periodic Review reports are discussed in detail at the Collaborative Provision Committee (CPC) and the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC), then into the reporting process already described up to Board of Governors level. The review team found that Periodic Review is a thorough process, while currently in abeyance due to the pandemic, based on APR reports (now PEPs) and can instigate minor or major changes.

3.3 Approaches to supporting innovation, identifying and sharing good practice

64   The review team found that the University is committed to enhancing the student learning experience by supporting innovative approaches and, in particular, having processes which identify good practice for dissemination, for example, through workshops, seminars and peer mentoring. The team met with senior and teaching staff at the visit, including staff from partner institutions, who confirmed the ethos of support across the organisation, for students and staff, and the identification and dissemination of good practice.

65   The University's approach to the support of innovation and the identification and sharing of good practice is based on its enhancement-led Strategic Plan and the role of the Quality Enhancement Directorate (QED). Quality processes are designed to identify good practice, for example, in Programme Enhancement Plans (PEPs), which feed into school and management reporting systems in addition to dissemination via QED workshops and online reporting.

66   The University's Quality Enhancement Directorate (QED) was formed in 2018, integrating quality assurance and quality enhancement and providing support to schools in their continuous enhancement. The QED works in partnership with the Students' Union, working on a number of initiatives to enhance the student experience. A Quality Enhancement Conference takes place each year highlighting good practice from across the University and is also open to local and TNE partners.

67   The University has a longstanding Staff Peer Learning and Development Scheme which was updated recently to emphasise the enhancement ethos and is managed by the QED. The scheme is designed to provide support and opportunities for reflection and also to identify good practice and development opportunities. While face-to-face activity is currently curtailed, staff confirmed that online activity continues, with much appreciated IT support, including for partner organisations.

68   The review team found that there is an ethos of identifying and sharing of good practice at the University which has been enhanced during the pandemic by increased use of online portals to share presentations and events, many at school level but then shared globally.

3.4 Engaging, developing and supporting staff

69   The University's approach to engaging, developing and supporting staff is based on its People Strategy. People are one of the three pillars that support the delivery of the University's Strategic Plan. The strategic approach is based on the attraction and development, of staff, staff wellbeing and workforce planning and review.

70   The review team found that the University offers a wide range of support and development opportunities to staff, both at the University and to its many partners. Driven by the Strategic Plan and Student Engagement Strategy, there is an institutional culture which values and rewards teaching at all levels and where the principles of the UK Professional Standards Framework are embedded. This ethos is detailed in the QED Team Charter, which, for example, states a key objective is to facilitate staff development to enable the effective delivery and support of an innovative curriculum that is current and in alignment with sector practice, ensuring staff development is valued by all staff and stakeholders.

71   Teaching staff undertake mandatory development on, for example, developments in the VLE and online meeting software, and have a learning passport on which development activity is recorded. A wide range of continuing professional development (CPD)

opportunities are available via the CPD pages on the QED website, plus a range of workshops and sessions through the academic year. Staff are encouraged to learn or improve their Welsh language skills. All training opportunities are also available to collaborative provision staff. There is an expectation that all academic staff will be engaged in annual peer learning opportunities and the Staff Peer Learning and Development Scheme is designed to provide support and identify opportunities for development, as well as good practice. Observations of teaching are undertaken by peers, and by link tutors/moderators at partner institutions, and feed into performance reviews.

72   The University provides events and workshops guiding and supporting staff through the process of becoming a Fellow and Senior Fellow of Advance HE (with the number of fellowships currently at 341). New staff without a teaching qualification undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching Higher Education (PgCTHE), leading to Associate Fellowship or Fellowship of Advance HE. The University is accredited by Advance HE to confer Fellowship through its panels for Associate Fellow and Fellow, and Senior and Principal Fellow panels respectively. Postgraduate students are encouraged to undertake some teaching at school level, and, if not already holding a teaching qualification, can undertake a module or modules of the PgCTHE. Currently 22% of on-campus postgraduate research students undertake roles as associate tutors, technicians/demonstrators or classroom demonstrators (see also paragraph 36).

3.5   Effectiveness of the approach to implementing institutional strategies and enhancing learning and teaching

73   The work of the Learning and Teaching Development Unit (LTDU) in providing a comprehensive range of opportunities and resources for the enhancement of learning and teaching was a feature of good practice in the previous QAA review. During the current review the team found that the processes in place remain largely effective. The approach in the Strategic Plan indicates the measures of success against which the strategy is monitored and evaluated. Senior staff and governing body members confirmed progress against these measures. In particular, the Quality Enhancement Directorate (QED), the successor to the LTDU, ensures the provision of support for all staff in their teaching and support for students.

74   A key strategic priority is stated as the Cardiff Met EDGE: Ethical, Digital, Global and Entrepreneurial framework. This is described as a core priority, enabling students to gain essential skills by embedding their development in the curricula, but does require a further, specific strategy for communication to students (see paragraph 43).

75   Assessment against key performance indicators indicate that much is being achieved, including improvement in NSS satisfaction rates, increased student numbers, increase in the number of Advance HE fellowships and staff with PhDs.

76   Overall, the review team found that, while not all initiatives are fully embedded, it has confidence in the University's strategic approach to implementing its strategies to enhance learning and teaching.

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

77   The University's strategies and processes are focused on the enhancement of learning and teaching at all levels, with robust reporting procedures. The University is aware of shortcomings - for example, retention and highly-skilled employment progression - and is developing strategies in those areas. Strategies are monitored by the Board of Governors, informed by regular formal reports from Management Board and Academic Board and by the SU Officers, Vice-Chancellor and other senior staff.

78   External examiner reports broadly confirm that the currency, relevance and coherence of programmes are appropriate and aligned with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* (FHEQ) and Subject Benchmark Statements. Any concerns raised by external examiners are addressed through team responses to the report, in Programme Enhancement Plans, and through formal reporting mechanisms at school and management level. Good practice is similarly noted for dissemination through the reporting processes and at seminars, workshops and annual enhancement conferences.

79   The review team found that the developing use of data based on student characteristics, engagement and outcomes across the University through data dashboards, together with timely student support, and robust and effective reporting processes, is leading to effective enhancements of learning and teaching.

4   Academic standards and quality processes

4.1   Key features of the provider's approach to managing quality and how students are involved in contributing to the management of the quality of learning

80   Responsibility for the quality of the student learning experience and for the standards of the awards made to students lies with the Academic Board. Academic Board is accountable to the Board of Governors for these matters and provides an Annual Assurance Report which, in turn, allows the governors to confirm that the University has complied with the five HEFCW quality assurance governance statements. Academic Board delegates detailed oversight of quality and standards to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) which is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Student Engagement currently and, for the last two years, by the Director of Learning Enhancement. The Pro-Vice Chancellor also chairs the Learning, Teaching and Student Engagement Committee (LTSEC) which is responsible, on behalf of Academic Board, for overseeing all aspects of the quality enhancement of taught programmes. LTSEC is a more discursive body than AQSC and focuses on monitoring and improving the experience of all taught students wherever and however they study.

81   The review team noted two key features of the university's current approach to managing quality. Firstly, there is an explicit policy commitment to engaging students in the assurance and enhancement of their learning experience and that this should not just be a consultative process but also include partnership working with student-led opportunities. How this is achieved is set out in a Student Participation in Quality Processes Policy 2019, written with input from the Students' Union, which outlines all the opportunities that are available to students to have their say and engage with a range of processes. Secondly, the University had recently reorganised its quality management structures, in particular, creating in 2019, the Quality Enhancement Directorate (QED) to manage both quality and coordinate learning enhancement initiatives. At the same time, posts of Associate Deans Student Engagement were created in each of the five schools to work closely with QED and academic staff in developing student engagement. The review team was told that the benefits of these changes had been significant in allowing academics in the schools and the professional staff in QED to work in a coordinated way.

82   Students participate at all stages of the management of academic quality and standards. They are represented on university and school panels and committees that design and approve the curriculum as well as those that monitor and review learning and teaching. Students receive training to support their roles as members of periodic review and programme approval panels. Academic programme leaders respond to student feedback that is provided in module evaluations and the NSS by compiling annual action plans for each programme of study. The outcomes of all sources of student feedback and evidence of

student progression are used by the Deputy Deans of the schools to produce annual Student Experience Improvement Plans (SEIPs). At the institutional level, the ADSEs from all five schools lead a Student Voice Group (see paragraph 27), which includes representation by student union officers, that considers all sources of student opinion and monitors the outcomes of actions plans.

4.2 Key features of the approach to setting, maintain, reviewing and assessing academic standards

83   The University has in place, a range of procedures to ensure that the standards of the awards it makes are aligned with sector requirements and benchmarks. These include: assessment regulations that require robust and effective assessment; assurances from external examiners that standards applied are comparable with those in the higher education sector; programme approval and revalidation procedures that use external advisers to test whether courses and qualifications are aligned with the FHEQ qualification descriptors, QAA Subject Benchmark Statements, and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements where appropriate; and that these procedures are consistent with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The policies and procedures for setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards are set out in volumes 1 and 2 of the Academic Handbook which is currently being reviewed.

84   Evidence is gathered across 11 dimensions to demonstrate maintenance of the standards of awards and support for student learning. These are reported to Academic Board, and subsequently to the Board of Governors and follow a model suggested by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) covering key indicators such as the judgements and reports of external examiners, evaluations by PSRBs, the outcomes of internal periodic and annual reviews of programmes, student assessment outcomes, a wide range of measures of student satisfaction and experience, and evaluations of student engagement in academic governance. Measures of learning support for students are also collated and evaluated by professional service departments, such as QED and Library and Information Services, which report on the quality of taught and research degrees delivered both at the University and its collaborative partners. This evidence is considered by the university-level quality management committees (AQSC, LTSEC, RDC and CPC) before presentation to Academic Board and the Board of Governors. The review team, in addition to meeting staff and students, were able to examine minutes of the relevant committees responsible for managing quality together with the evidence presented to them.

85   Up to academic year 2019-20, the University carried out annual programme reviews (APRs) in which schools monitored standards by considering award outcomes and student progression, together with the judgements of external examiners, and reported on these to AQSC. From the beginning of the academic year 2020-21, the University replaced the established APR system with a revised process of Programme Enhancement Plans (PEPs). AQSC agreed that, due to the significant changes that had taken place to learning and teaching from March 2020 in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the burden of work placed on staff and students to respond to these changes, the University would change the current method of annual monitoring from the autumn term of 2020-21. The revised process of Programme Enhancement Plans (PEPs) was approved and was being applied by schools at the time of this review. The PEP method combined NSS action plans with a simplified APR process. The new system relied on the recent enhancements to contemporaneous programme data and student analytics that monitor student activity, performance and outcomes. Staff and students discuss and evaluate the data on student progression and feedback during PEP discussion meetings. Programme directors then produce action plans focusing on areas where performance is below benchmarks.

86   In its meetings with managers and academic staff, the review team was told that

the new system was working well and allowing modules and programmes to be monitored during the course of the academic year and adjusted more quickly where problems of quality or standards were emerging. A review of the implementation of the new annual monitoring system by QED was planned to take place in spring 2021 and would allow AQSC to determine which elements of the PEP process and which elements of the APR process should be retained in the future.

4.3 Use of external reference points in quality processes

87   The University's management of quality and standards applies policies and procedures designed to meet a range of external academic reference points. These are principally: the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) Part 1; the quality assurance national frameworks (FHEQ, CQFW and Subject Benchmark Statements); and the advice and guidance set out in the 12 thematic sections of the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). Remapping exercises had taken place regularly to ensure the University's policies and practices remained consistent with these external reference points.

88   The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 resulted in various additions and amendments to the regulatory and quality frameworks applied by the University. In particular, in June 2020, HEFCW issued the circular 'CV-19 Impact on HE Providers: Funding, Regulation and Reporting Implications W20/11HE'. This asked universities to observe the Quality Code together with CV-19-related supplements. Also, in June, the QAA published a series of guidance and briefing notes to assist providers in observing the Quality Code while adapting to the pandemic. The University revised its policies to take account of these changes to reporting and regulatory requirements.

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

89   The constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic required changes to student assessment from March 2020. Due to the exceptional and unprecedented constraints on student gatherings during the pandemic, Academic Board agreed that module leaders could change assessment types during the upcoming assessment period. New assessment procedures were put in place that involved two main changes. Firstly, a 'no detriment' safety net policy was applied to 2019-20 modules where the module delivery had commenced no later than 30 June 2020. This policy ensured that students' final academic year average marks were no lower than the average attained through formal assessment completed prior to 20 March 2020. Secondly, formal seated examinations were replaced with online assessments and electronically submitted open-book examinations together with the opportunity of an automatic two-week extension to the original submission date for any written work. These changes were put in place to allow students time to make any necessary adjustments to their ways of working. The changes to assessment methods and examination arrangements were communicated to, and agreed as appropriate by, external examiners, relevant PSRBs and the Students' Union. The Student Union President and Vice-President, as full members, also attended the monthly meetings of the Board of Governors and the Combined Academic Board - the latter being the merged Academic Board and Management Board, done to streamline decision-making in light of the pandemic - and contributed to the decision-making on teaching and assessment during 2020.

90   The pattern of undergraduate degree results in the summer of 2020 was reported to LTSEC in October 2020. The proportion of upper honours (first and second honours classifications) awarded in 2019-20 to all UK-based undergraduate students increased to 79.9%, representing a 9% rise on the previous academic year. The sector average for upper honours in 2018-19 was 76.7%. The increase in 2020 followed rises in the previous three

years in upper honours outcomes (1%, 2%, 4%) which the University has attributed to changes in the algorithm used to calculate degree classifications. The report also noted attainment gaps for some categories of student: male students, BME students and non-EU overseas students. The review team was told by the University that LTSEC would address these issues during 2020-21 (see paragraph 33).

91   The review team considered whether changes in the proportions of students obtaining first and upper-second honours degrees since 2017 indicated a pattern of degree inflation which reflected on the standards of awards made. The data were discussed at meetings with senior management and academic staff of the University. The University had established a Good Honours Degree Working Group which had reported to Academic Board in 2015. It had examined reasons for the lower proportions of upper honours awards made by CMU compared with other universities in the sector. Evidence was gathered showing that although CMU students were awarded examination marks similar to others in the sector, and that these marks were regularly confirmed by external examiners, the method used to aggregate marks to calculate degree classifications was disadvantaging students compared with others in the sector. Academic Board agreed and implemented changes to the relevant academic regulations to bring the University's practice into line with identified comparator institutions.

92   The 'no detriment' policy and the substitution of online open-book assessments for timed, unseen examinations from March 2020 were careful and necessary responses to the restrictions required during the COVID-19 pandemic. No changes were made to the methods or criteria used to award marks for the types of assessment that remained viable and the changes were consistent with QAA guidance on securing academic standards and supporting student achievement issued during 2020. External examiners and examination boards confirmed there were no changes to the standards applied. For good reasons, coursework and open-book assessments allow students more scope to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes and so generate higher marks than unseen examinations. The review team considered that the University's 'no detriment' policy was appropriate and that the increased proportion of first and upper-second honours degrees accurately measured the performance of students in the forms of assessment that were possible in the context of the ongoing pandemic. The team also noted the continuing pattern of attainment gaps for some categories of student was a problem seen across the sector, and that the Learning Teaching and Student Experience Committee will consider measures to address these in 2020-21.

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

93   In the SEAD, the University had asked the review team to evaluate 'using data to drive quality' as one of five areas of focus that had been selected within the QER Review. At the time of the review visit, the University was halfway through the implementation of the One Cardiff Met Digital Strategy 2018-19 to 2022-23. The Strategy is overseen by a cross-institutional Digital Strategy Committee, chaired by the Director of Library and Information Services, and reporting to the Academic and Management Board and LTSEC. The Digital Strategy has two main aims. Firstly, to establish a technical and data environment in which all students on and off-campus would have a consistent, personalised, seamless digital experience. Secondly, to allow all the core activities supporting the student journey, and the management of quality and standards, to be informed by readily available and user-friendly data. The University accepted that at the start of this project, the data needed by students, academic and professional services staff was housed in a variety of forms and could be difficult to access and integrate.

94   The review team saw evidence and heard from students and staff that significant progress has been made in achieving the objectives of the digital strategy. Students met by

the team confirmed that they have effective access to online teaching and learning, including lectures and seminars, and to a VLE providing the information and resources they needed to pursue their programmes of study and to submit their work for assessment. These systems have become fundamental in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the transfer of most learning and teaching to online only delivery. While there were some reports of systems being briefly unavailable due to faults or maintenance, and of some variations in the use of the systems by academic staff, it was clear that online learning and teaching had worked effectively. In particular, both students and staff reported that online help as well as training modules were readily available and appropriate (see also paragraph 46).

95   Progress has been made since 2018 in the presentation of data supporting recruitment and student progression. Academic and administrative staff can access and interrogate dashboards of timely data, reporting applications, student characteristics - such as gender, age, ethnicity and qualifications - and subsequently, retention and graduate outcomes and employment destinations. Other dashboards provide benchmarked information on academic programmes including module evaluations, NSS results, student attainment and progression. These information sources were provided automatically as the data foundations for the new PEP method of annual review, introduced from the beginning of academic year 2020-21, which appeared to be working well (see paragraph 85).

96   Significant progress has also been made in providing programme leaders and particularly personal tutors with learning analytics reporting such measures as student use of the VLE, assessment grades, and physical library loans. Work was in progress to add use of e-learning materials, class attendances and notifications of non-engagement (such as failure to submit work) as well as interactions with student support services. As reported above (see paragraph 40), the team heard evidence from students and staff that the personal tutor system was working well and that this was in part because of the availability of live information about students' progress and activity.

97   Two key components of the digital strategy were still at early stages of development. The University was currently evaluating bids and preparing to commission a new student record system together with the provision of personalised student timetables. Secondly, work was beginning to specify a curriculum management and development system that would support quality processes such as the design and validation of programmes, the integration of EDGE principles, monitoring alignment with university strategies, and the provision of bespoke data packages for the programme team. The review team concluded that there had been substantial progress in the development and use of data to monitor the student journey through the University and to manage the quality of the student experience. Both the One Cardiff Met Digital Strategy 2018-19 to 2022-23 and its ongoing implementation have the potential to deliver the University's aims. The review team affirms the significant progress in the use of data sources to support the student experience.

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

98   The University's strategies and processes are focused on the enhancement of learning and teaching at all levels, with robust reporting procedures. The University is aware of shortcomings - for example, retention and highly-skilled employment progression - and is developing strategies in those areas. Strategies are monitored by the Board of Governors, informed by regular formal reports from Management Board and Academic Board and by the SU Officers, Vice-Chancellor and other senior staff.

99   External examiner reports broadly confirm that the currency, relevance and coherence of programmes are appropriate and aligned with the FHEQ and Subject Benchmarks. Any concerns raised by external examiners are addressed through team

responses to the report, in Programme Enhancement Plans, and through formal reporting mechanisms at school and management level. Good practice is similarly noted for dissemination through the reporting processes and at seminars, workshops and annual enhancement conferences.

100   The review team found that the developing use of data based on student characteristics, engagement and outcomes across the University through data dashboards, together with timely student support, and robust and effective reporting processes, is leading to effective enhancements of learning and teaching.

4.7   Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards

101   The policies and procedures applied by the University to ensure the standards of its awards are clearly set out in the Academic Handbook and their application systematically and effectively monitored by Academic Board and its supporting committee structures in the University and the schools. The University has taken particular care to adjust the arrangements for the management of standards to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Effective use is made of external expertise in both the assessment of students and the approval and review of academic programmes. The review team concluded that the management of academic standards is robust and effective.

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

102   Since 2016, the University has evaluated and restructured its deliberative and administrative arrangements for the management of standards and the quality of the student experience. In particular, the oversight and effectiveness of the key academic committees (AQSC, LTSEC and RDC) has been enhanced. At the same time, the establishment of QED, the appointment of the Associate Deans for Student Engagement, and the development of more accessible data sources has increased the consistency and timeliness of support for students and their learning. The review team concluded that the University's approach to self-evaluation and its use of statistics were effective.

5   Collaborative provision

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

103   The University states that engagement with collaborative partners is crucial to it achieving its transnational education (TNE), research, civic engagement, community development and innovation ambitions. The University's Strategic Plan focuses on the potential impact of TNE provision to increase student and staff mobility, collaborative international research and develop synergy between off and on-campus recruitment; its 'Looking Out International Strategy' makes a commitment to develop strong, sustainable and high-quality partnerships that bring multiple benefits.

104   In meetings with the review team, senior staff confirmed that, following a period of growth, the University is not seeking to expand its TNE partnerships, but to deepen engagement with existing partners and intends to grow the number of partnerships with Welsh further education Colleges to eight, thereby increasing student progression to the University from schools and colleges. To achieve this, the University is developing its Open Colleges Network and has appointed an Open Colleges Network Lead in the Quality Enhancement Department (QED).

105   The University identified partnerships as an area of strength for this review; senior staff informed the team that these strengths included the University's values as an institution in providing opportunities to students who would not normally have access to British higher education, the University's global outlook, the mobility between partners and the opportunities for partners to feed into curriculum design and development.

106   The review team found that the University has an appropriate and effective, management and academic governance structure for oversight of collaborative provision. Executive responsibility for partnerships rests with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Partnerships and External Engagement). Collaborative Provision Committee (CPC), a sub-committee of AQSC has responsibility for the oversight of franchised and validated collaborative provision. The effectiveness of CPC was reviewed during 2019-20 and changes made to its terms of reference and membership; the role of CPC in relation to further education college partnerships is currently under review. The minutes of CPC demonstrate diligent oversight of collaborative provision, with appropriate reporting to AQSC. In 2020, CPC established a working group to support its response to the pandemic including overseeing processes for temporary changes to curriculum and assessment, application of the 'no detriment' policy and the approach to periodic review. Academic Board maintains an overview of the quality and standards of the University's collaborative provision, through reports and minutes from AQSC and scrutiny of data such as programme outcomes.

107   Until the pandemic, the Governors' Transnational Education Committee (GTNEC), reporting to the Board of Governors, focused on the risks and benefits of new developments and the effectiveness of continuing partnerships. The team learned in discussion with governors that it had been established at a time when there was significant expansion in the University's TNE provision. As a result of changes to governance during the pandemic, strategic discussions on partnerships now take place at Board of Governors meetings and the future of GTNEC is being considered as part of a Board Effectiveness Review. Governors confirmed that they remain satisfied that the information they receive is sufficient to assure them that partnerships are operating effectively; this information includes the Annual Assurance Report.

108   At school level, oversight of collaborative provision is appropriately managed through school Learning and Teaching Committees (LTCs) or where schools have significant collaborative provision, through sub-groups which report regularly to LTCs and CPC.

109   QED actively supports the quality assurance and enhancement of partnerships with a dedicated Collaborative Provision Specialist and Partnership Engagement Manager working with the Open Colleges Network and school-based moderators and link tutors. QED also works with the Global Engagement team whose focus is on relationship management and business development. Study abroad arrangements are overseen by the Global Engagement team. Additional roles enhance operational oversight of partnerships including Associate Deans Partnership in each school, a Partnership Manager based within the Global Engagement team for each TNE partnership, and school-based link tutors and moderators.

110   Regulations governing collaborative partnerships are contained in the Academic Handbook which is currently under review. The team consistently heard from the University and its partners that the University's standard policies, procedures and regulations apply to collaborative provision; these were generally well understood by partners with the exception of the procedures for handling complaints and academic appeals (see paragraph 111 below). A comprehensive Collaborative Provision Handbook provides key information to partners. Partners issue programme handbooks to their students, the template for which is provided by the University. While students confirmed that they normally receive handbooks at the start of the academic year, some students commented that there had been a delay in receiving the handbook this academic year.

111   The University sets out its policies and procedures for complaints and academic appeals in its Academic Handbook. Students studying through partners are expected to raise complaints with their institutions and, if not resolved satisfactorily, can invoke the University's complaints procedure. The University retains responsibility for academic appeals. In meetings with the team, partner staff and students were unable to clearly articulate these procedures. Some students explained this was because they had not used them but were also unsure where to find either local or university procedures should they need them, while other students explained they had tried unsuccessfully to escalate a complaint to the University. The minutes of a meeting between university staff and a TNE partner, dated April 2020, stated that students had been contacting the University directly to complain following which the partner was asked to ensure that they rewrite their internal complaints procedure; while the moderator's report for an further education college partner, dated March 2020, noted that students had not been given a copy of their local complaints procedure, the report also noted that it was available on the partner's website and that students had been reminded of this in October 2019. In meetings with the team, staff from some TNE partners explained how they deal with academic appeals internally. The University provides standard text in relation to these policies and procedures to be included in partner student handbooks, with information added by the partner in relation to their own complaints procedures. In the handbooks seen by the team, the text is very brief and does not clearly explain how appeals are dealt with, with some handbooks providing a general link to the University's Academic Handbook, which has multiple volumes, rather than a direct link to the Appeals procedure, while others have a link to the University's Student Handbook which again refers to the Academic Handbook. In a sample of one partner college's 2020-21 student handbooks, the team found that the link to the college's complaints procedure was inactive. The team **recommends** that the University ensures that its requirements for handling complaints and academic appeals are fully understood by all partners and that these requirements are clearly and consistently communicated to partner students.

112   Partnerships are appropriately governed by an overarching Agreement for Academic Collaboration and a more detailed Memorandum of Agreement normally in place initially for five years; examples seen by the team were up-to-date and signed by both the University and the partner. The University issues all certificates and transcripts. Certificates do not record the location of study but refer to the transcript which includes this information.

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

113   The University's partnership provision encompasses a range of models including validated provision (programmes developed by a partner and approved by the University), franchised provision (programmes initially validated for delivery at the University and subsequently delivered by a partner), credit-bearing short courses, work-based learning, articulation and progression agreements, placements, study-abroad arrangements and apprenticeships. Senior staff confirmed that, although mentioned in the Academic Handbook, the University no longer offers outreach franchise programmes involving the use of flying faculty. All programmes are taught and assessed in English or Welsh, with programmes offered through TNE partnerships taught and assessed in English.

114   At the time of submission of the SEAD, the University had 9329 students studying on 101 programmes through TNE partnerships in 15 countries and 173 students studying through partners in Wales. Provision includes programmes delivered through two Welsh further education colleges, 17 TNE partners, 20 progression arrangements, 15 articulation arrangements with four of its TNE partners allowing students studying at diploma level to progress to franchised programmes and 101 international and EU student exchange partners. Three of its TNE partnerships are currently in teach-out. The University also offers one distance/blended learning, advanced entry MBA programme which involves the use of

partners' premises for supervision arrangements.

5.3 Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative provision including arrangements for securing academic standards and enhancing the student learning experience

115   Approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision follow the University's standard procedures; in recognition of the increased risk associated with partnerships, additional mechanisms are in place.

116   Approval of a partner and related provision involve a multi-stage approval process including initial vetting, due diligence and risk assessment, following which, if the recommendation is to proceed, an appropriate approval mechanism is invoked. Collaborative partner staff are approved at the point of validation and thereafter, moderators or link tutors are expected to approve any changes to the teaching team. Reports from approval events demonstrate that panels include at least one external panellist and, in some cases, a student panel member, with recent events during the pandemic having been conducted virtually, albeit with the same rigour. CPC receive the reports of these events and outcomes are also reported to ASQC. Appropriate processes are in place to approve a new campus location for an existing partner and periodic due diligence ensures that a partner can continue to fulfil its responsibilities.

117   Until this academic year, collaborative partners completed Annual Programme Review (APR) reports, prior to submission to the relevant school. Once submitted, collaborative partner APRs follow the same process as that for on-campus provision, with summaries being produced by schools. The review team found that collaborative partner APRs reflect on a range of data as well as issues raised by students, external examiners, link tutors or moderators, with strengths and areas for improvement also noted; actions are captured and the previous year's actions reported on. For the 2020-21 academic year, as with on-campus provision, partners are required to produce simplified Programme Enhancement Plans (PEPs) (see paragraph 62). Partner staff were aware of this change of approach and commented positively on the enhancement focus of the PEPs.

118   Until recently, partners were also reviewed annually through the Annual Review of Partners (ARP) process, covering both the business and quality perspectives of a partnership. ARPs informed the Annual Assurance to Governors and were presented to GTNEC. The team heard from senior staff that this process had become less important, tending to duplicate other processes while the 2019-2020 Annual Assurance Report to Governors notes that the process has been discontinued.

119   The periodic review of partnerships normally occurs on a five-yearly cycle and provides assurance that the partnership is operating satisfactorily, in accordance with the terms of the agreements. Collaborative partner programmes are also reviewed on a five-yearly cycle following the University's standard processes; an elective review, following essentially the same process as periodic review, may take place earlier if a programme needs to be modified within the five-year period (see paragraph 63). The team found the University's partnership and programme periodic review processes to be thorough, focusing on enhancement of the partnership or programme and the student learning experience. Outcomes from these processes are reported through CPC and ASQC. Due to the pandemic, the University has adopted a risk-based approach to periodic review, wherever possible deferring periodic reviews scheduled for 2020-21 to 2021-22; where partnership reviews are scheduled for 2020-21, CPC is considering these on a case-by-case basis.

120   The University has a robust procedure in place for serious concerns in respect of a collaborative programme or partnership, most recently invoked in 2019 in relation to the

Modern University of Business and Science (MUBS) Lebanon. This resulted in a tailored partnership review, robust action plan and careful monitoring through the University's committee structure, with actions resulting in improvements in the quality of the student experience.

121   Appropriate exit strategies are also in place for the termination of a partnership. Currently, the University has three partnerships in teach-out including a long-standing partnership with the London School of Commerce (LSC), expected to be completed in March 2021 for taught programmes and September 2022 for research degrees. The team noted the regular and detailed reporting through the University's committee structure, ensuring robust oversight of these teach out processes.

122   The team found that moderators and link tutors are central to, and enhance, the operational oversight of, and provision of academic support for, collaborative partnerships; this model of academic support has recently been reviewed. In discussion with staff at the University, the team established that, in general, moderators (subject specialists) work at programme level and link tutors at partnership level - the latter supported by subject specialists within their schools. Moderators and link tutors normally visit partners at least twice a year, recently communicating electronically, and produce two reports, the first being developmental and the second a full report, reporting on academic standards, the quality of the student learning experience and noting any actions necessary to enhance provision; an overview of these reports which identifies strengths and areas for improvement is presented to CPC. Link tutors and moderators are members of partner programme committees which are attended by partner student representatives and meet with students during their visits (see paragraph 72); they also deliver partner staff training, supplementing those activities offered by the University such as the Annual Partner Conference. The role carried out by moderators and link tutors is highly valued by partners.

123   Assessment tasks are set and internally moderated by partners and then moderated by the moderator or link tutor prior to being sent to the external examiner. Wherever possible, the same external examiner is used for the home programme and its franchise. External examiners confirm equivalence of standards across home and collaborative provision and partner staff see and respond to external examiner reports. An annual review of examiners' reports across home programmes and partner provision is presented to AQSC and CPC, summarising good practice and areas for improvement.

124   As noted above, the University has an appropriate and effective management and governance structure for the oversight of collaborative partnerships; its procedures for approval, monitoring and review are long standing, and in some instances have been enhanced since the previous review. Procedures are generally the same as for on-campus provision with additional mechanisms in place as appropriate. Diligent oversight of quality and standards is maintained when teach-out is in progress and where serious concerns were raised in 2019 in relation to one TNE partnership, appropriate and timely action was taken. The team **commends** the well-embedded and robust oversight of TNE partnerships which ensures that academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience are not at risk.

125   Further education college partnerships are generally subject to the same oversight mechanisms as noted above. During the review visit, the team spoke with students from the University's two current further education college partners. Students from one partner expressed satisfaction with their learning experience. However, the team found that four students on a programme franchised to the other partner were very dissatisfied with their experience and, in particular, with the way complaints had been handled, how their voices are heard, and with the turnover and quality of some teaching staff. The team heard from the University that some students on this programme had been very vocal from the start of the

year and how close contact had been maintained with students at school and programme levels. Minutes of the June 2020 programme committee show a number of issues had been raised by students. This dissatisfaction was also reflected in the 2018-19 NSS outcomes with overall satisfaction in 2018-19 being 27 per cent. In 2019-20, after action was taken to address the 2018-19 outcomes, overall satisfaction increased to 64 per cent, although this is still below the sector average. No issues were raised in the most recent external examiner report which confirmed that standards are appropriate. The moderator's report and associated action plan dated 30/06/2020 noted that more than one cohort of students had been raising concerns about the standard of teaching over the past two years. The report expresses concern that students were still raising concerns despite recent actions, with a further action noted for module feedback and results to be analysed to ascertain whether this matter had affected student attainment, with a target date of June 2021. As a result of student concerns, a programme action plan was put in place in November 2020 and updated in January 2021 to address staffing, marking and its consistency, study skills, feedback timing, lecture pace, lecture content, the 'no detriment' policy and portfolios. While the review team acknowledges the actions taken by the University, it was concerned that students with whom they met, albeit a small sample, reported significant ongoing concerns about the quality of their experience. In conclusion, the review team **affirms** the actions being taken to address concerns raised by students on a franchised programme in one further education partner in relation to the quality of their learning experience. Given the ongoing concerns of these students, the team encourages the University to continue to evaluate the timeliness and effectiveness of the actions taken.

126   The University offers students a range of work-based learning (WBL) and placement and study abroad opportunities in traditional programmes and has also started its first Degree Apprenticeship. Guidelines relating to WBL and placements are included in the Academic Handbook. Placements or WBL opportunities are offered on a large number of the University's programmes, some of which are linked to the requirements of external agencies or PSRBs which follow slightly different processes. Placements are supported through the central Placement team, ensuring a consistent approach to the setting up of placements, including, for example, undertaking risk assessments. Appropriate agreements are in place with placement providers. Students are supported by placement handbooks and once on placement are overseen and visited by academic staff from the relevant school. Roles and responsibilities are clearly set out in the University's 'Guidelines to Best Practice in WBL' delivery' and the team found that these were well understood by all involved. Students spoke very positively about their experiences of placements and the support provided by the University, and employers spoke highly of their experience of having the University's students on placement with them. The team also heard of the work that had been undertaken by the University to ensure that where placements had been affected by the pandemic, other options were put in place. The team **commends** the consistent and highly effective organisation and management of placement activity across the institution.