



Quality Enhancement Reviews (Wales) : end of cycle thematic report for sessions 2017-18 to 2021-22

Introduction

Quality Enhancement Review (QER) is the method by which the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) reviews Welsh higher education (HE) providers as part of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales. It provides a distinctive approach to institutional review, developed to address the particular context of the Welsh HE sector.

QER provides quality assurance and supports quality enhancement, assuring governing bodies, students and the wider public that providers meet the requirements of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (Medr). QER assesses providers against the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and the relevant requirements of the baseline standards of the Quality Assessment Framework in Wales

All outcome and technical reports are [published](#) on QAA's web pages.

Timing of Quality Enhancement Reviews

There were ten QERs between sessions 2017-18 and 2021-22.

Provider	Year
Aberystwyth University	April 2022
Bangor University	May 2018
Cardiff Metropolitan University	January 2021
Cardiff University	March 2020
Grŵp Llandrillo Menai	May 2022
Neath Port Talbot College trading as NPTC Group of Colleges	June 2022
Swansea University	November 2022
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	March 2022
University of South Wales	July 2022
Wrexham Glyndŵr University	March 2019

Analysis of review outcomes

Judgements

For all 10 reviews the conclusions were that each provider had:

- met the requirements of the ESG Part 1 for internal quality assurance, and
- met the relevant baseline regulatory requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales.

Commendations

Review teams may commend practice that they identify as a process or way of working that makes a particularly positive contribution to the student learning experience within the context of the provider ([see QER method handbook](#)).

There were 39 commendations across the 10 providers. Each provider received at least one commendation. The largest number of commendations was six for Neath Port Talbot College trading as NPTC Group of Colleges.

The following common themes are summarised, as follows (Appendix 1 lists and groups all commendations in their entirety).

Student partnership and voice (six providers) – with seven commendations, this was the most frequently commended area of practice. Effective student partnership work; commitment to student voice; strategic focus on communication and dialogue with students; and the contribution of specific role functions were just some of the practises recognised for their positive impact on the student experience.

Pandemic response (five providers) – half of the providers were commended for their responses to the pandemic. Acting rapidly; minimising the disruptive impact to students, and actions which continue to have a legacy effect on digital, pedagogical and student support approaches, as well as developing regulation and policies to flex in an exceptionally challenging external environment, were some of the actions recognised by review teams.

Student support (four providers) – commendations related to tailoring supporting; breadth and depth of support; effective support monitoring; and a digital resource.

Partner institutions (four providers) – commended aspects of practice were: well-managed partnerships meeting the needs of local students and regional employers; comprehensive and accessible support; approach to improving student progression, within and from, collaborative partners; oversight of transnational education partnerships; and supportive and collegiate relationship with partners.

Use of external reference points (four providers) – commendations covered: extensive engagement with external guidance, expertise and networks; the inclusion of employers and other external subject experts within the design and delivery of programmes; responsiveness to national and regional employability needs; students' engagement with research activities.

The use of data (three providers) – three commendations related to: comprehensive availability and use of data that is embedded in quality processes; a data dashboard, which provides staff with a wide range of accurate, useful and accessible data; and the systematic collection and use of student engagement and performance data.

Institution-wide approaches (three providers) – three providers were recognised for provider-wide initiatives impacting positively on the student experience. The initiatives focused on: consistent management and enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience; strategic management and operational development and review of the academic portfolio to ensure continued relevance of programmes; and implementation of a set of coherent strategies designed to support the enhancement of the student learning experience.

Digital provision (two providers) – the development and effective use of digital technology was commended in one provider, the second commendation in another provider related to the extensive use of technology to support delivery.

Staff capacity and capability (one provider) - the commendations related to: the provider's expansion of the HE staff team to recognise the distinctiveness of the HE provision and to create a HE community; and encouraging all HE staff to pursue professional development.

Welsh language (two providers) - the deeply embedded bilingualism in all aspects of university life was commended. In another provider, the readily accessible and embedded support for staff teaching and assessing through Welsh language medium was commended, in addition to staff and students learning Welsh that encourages engagement and participation with the language.

Placement (one provider) - the consistent and highly-effective organisation and management of placement activity across the institution was commended.

Affirmations

There were 21 affirmations across the 10 providers. Each provider received at least one affirmation. The largest number of affirmations was three for: Grŵp Llandrillo Menai; Neath Port Talbot College trading as NPTC Group of Colleges; Swansea and Bangor Universities.

An affirmation is recognition of an action arising from the effective use of a provider's own quality procedures that is already taking place in a provider to improve a recognised weakness or inadequacy related to the judgement areas. In the current cycle of QERs, affirmations have been replaced by *areas of ongoing development*. The definition from the current [method handbook](#) is:

An area(s) of ongoing development is recognition of an action(s) initiated from the effective use of a provider's own quality procedures to secure in full the actions being taken to address an identified weakness.

The following common themes are summarised, as follows (Appendix 2 lists and groups all review affirmations in their entirety).

Quality assurance processes (three providers) – Academic Quality Handbook development; mapping processes to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education; and revision of the annual monitoring process.

Use of data (three providers) – data use to: inform decision making, evaluation and review processes; and support the student experience.

Partner institutions (three providers) – comparability of students learning experience across multi-campus locations and modes of study; 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; and the steps being taken to address the deficiencies

in the provision at one specific partner institution.

Doctoral students (three providers) – strengthening the postgraduate research community; creating a distinctive and consistent postgraduate research student experience; and enhancing institutional oversight of the postgraduate research students experience.

Students as co-creators (two providers) – partnering and involving students in enhancing the student experience.

Assessment (two providers) - implementation of an Assessment Framework; and enhancing policy and practice in academic assessment and feedback.

Other (four providers) – a range of issues including: review of the institutional peer observation policy; external examiner reports that make a distinction between the University's on-campus provision and that delivered at each partner college; streamlining the higher education admissions process; keeping programme specifications up to date; and increase higher education Welsh medium vocational opportunities across the region (relates to one specific institution).

Recommendations

There were 11 recommendations across the 10 providers. Five providers had no recommendations: Neath Port Talbot College trading as NPTC Group of Colleges; and Cardiff; Bangor; Swansea and South Wales Universities. Of the remaining five providers, three received three recommendations each: Cardiff Metropolitan University; University of Wales Trinity St David; and Aberystwyth University.

Review teams make recommendations where they agree that a provider should consider changing a practice, policy or a process in order to: safeguard academic standards; and assure the quality of, or have the potential to improve and enhance, the learning opportunities it provides for students ([see QER method handbook](#)).

The following common themes are summarised, as follows (Appendix 3 lists and groups all review recommendations in their entirety).

Postgraduate students (two providers) – the issues involved were about ensuring postgraduate research students undertaking or supporting teaching are trained; and undertaking regular evaluation of the research student experience.

Partner institutions (two providers) – ensuring teaching-out plans on course closure; supporting student representation; and managing student complaints and appeals.

Other issues (three providers) – a range of other issues including: programme employability outcomes; implementing appropriate training, for established academic staff, on quality processes; oversight of the personal tutor system; approval of external examiners for research degree awards; and issuing of assessment feedback in a timely manner.

Appendix 1

Providers' commendations

Commendations	Aberyst.	Bangor	Cardiff Met.	Cardiff	Grŵp Llandrillo	Neath Port	Swansea	Wales Trinity	South Wales	Wrexham Glyndŵr
Student partnership and voice										
1. The clear focus on strategic aims across the University, developed and implemented in partnership with students, that creates a cohesive approach to the enhancement of learning, teaching, and assessment.									<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
2. The review team commends the institution's commitment to student engagement and the student voice, enabling students to contribute to the overall quality of provision.						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
3. The Grŵp's strategic approach to the online and distance-learning provision that ensures an inclusive student learning experience.					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
4. The strong contribution made by the Associate Deans Student Engagement (ADSE) in consolidating student engagement and partnership between students and the University.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							
5. The strategic focus on communication and dialogue with students that builds a strong sense of community and drives the institutional enhancement of the student experience.							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
6. The strong focus on student partnership at the University that is embedded at all levels of the institution, and enables students to critically engage with the University's decision making.							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
7. The extensive, and culturally valued partnership with students, which permeates all facets of university life.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
Pandemic response										
8. The University's considered, well informed and effectively communicated response to the pandemic, which has enabled the University to reduce the impact on students and staff and to provide a									<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

Commendations	Aberyst.	Bangor	Cardiff Met.	Cardiff	Grŵp Llandrillo	Neath Port	Swansea	Wales Trinity	South Wales	Wrexham Glyndŵr
positive foundation for active learning.										
9. The review team commends the numerous steps taken to ensure continuity in teaching, learning, student support and well-being during the pandemic.						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
10. The wide range and impactful use of digital training, pedagogy and support developed during the pandemic which continues to enhance staff and student experience.								<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
11. The particularly proactive approach of the Library and Information Services (LIS) to further increase the level of support to students, particularly during the pandemic.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							
12. The agility and responsiveness of the actions taken by the University in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain continuity in learning and teaching and the student experience.							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
13. The actions taken by the University in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the continued robustness of quality assurance processes and regulatory matters, including the introduction of the Safety Net policy, and the application of emergency learning, teaching, and assessment regulations and policies.							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Student support										
14. The review team commends the institution's commitment to providing tailored support to students to meet their academic and pastoral needs so as to enable for all students, that enables their academic, personal and professional development.						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
15. The breadth and depth of student support services available at every campus and for all students, that enables their academic, personal and professional development.					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
16. The Student Hwb which provides students with a comprehensive and accessible electronic contact and information point that effectively supports their learning experience.								<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

Commendations	Aberyst.	Bangor	Cardiff Met.	Cardiff	Grŵp Llandrillo	Neath Port	Swansea	Wales Trinity	South Wales	Wrexham Glyndŵr
17. The deliberate and effective monitoring and support of individual students in a personalised way to facilitate their academic development.										<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Partner institutions										
18. The well-managed partnerships with the five Strategic Alliance further education colleges which meet the needs of local students and regional employers.									<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
19. The comprehensive and accessible support provided, in particular by the Collaborative Partnerships Office and the Partnership Team Leaders, to collaborative partner institutions that effectively assists partners in understanding and implementing UWTSD requirements.								<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
20. The coherent and effective approach to improving student progression within and from collaborative partners.								<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
21. 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.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							
22. The supportive and collegiate relationship the University develops with its partners that enables them to participate as equals in the partnership.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>									
Use of external reference points										
23. The University's extensive engagement with external guidance, expertise and networks which has positively informed their management of academic standards and enhancement of the student experience.									<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
24. The inclusion of employers and other external subject experts within the design and delivery of programmes that effectively enhances vocational experience and progression for students.					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
25. The responsiveness of the University to national and regional employability needs through the development of new focused and innovative partnerships.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>									
26. Opportunities provided by the Cardiff Undergraduate Research				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						

Commendations	Aberyst.	Bangor	Cardiff Met.	Cardiff	Grŵp Llandrillo	Neath Port	Swansea	Wales Trinity	South Wales	Wrexham Glyndŵr
Opportunities Programmes (CUROP) to students to engage with research activities to enhance their learning and future career prospects										
The use of data										
27. The comprehensive availability and use of data that is embedded in quality processes, and which enables timely and informed decisions that enhance the student experience.									<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
28. The data dashboard which provides staff with a wide range of accurate, useful and accessible data, enabling the University to comprehensively and effectively monitor its performance in relation to the standards of its awards and the quality of the student learning experience.								<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
29. The systematic collection and use of student engagement and performance data to inform and enhance student support and academic progress.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
Institution wide approaches										
30. The impact of the Quality Enhancement Directorate (QED) initiatives in ensuring the consistent management and enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							
31. The University's proactive use of well-developed processes and procedures for the effective strategic management and operational development and review of its academic portfolio to ensure continued relevance of its programmes.							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
32. The articulation and dissemination of a comprehensive set of coherent strategies designed to support the enhancement of the student learning experience.										<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Digital provision										
33. The review team commends the development and effective use of digital technology across NPTC Group of Colleges, within a supportive environment, enabling the ongoing enhancement of teaching and						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

Commendations	Aberyst.	Bangor	Cardiff Met.	Cardiff	Grŵp Llandrillo	Neath Port	Swansea	Wales Trinity	South Wales	Wrexham Glyndŵr
learning.										
34. The comprehensive teaching and learning facilities available to students including the extensive use of technology to support delivery.					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Staff capacity and capability										
35. The review team commends the institution's expansion of the HE staff team to recognise the distinctiveness of the HE provision and to create a HE community in order to enhance the student experience.						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
36. The review team commends NPTC Group of Colleges' commitment to encouraging all HE staff to pursue professional development in relation to teaching, learning and student support at HE level in order to benefit the individual and the student body.						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Welsh language										
37. The deeply embedded bilingualism in all aspects of university life which positively impacts on student experience.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
38. The readily accessible and embedded support for staff teaching and assessing through Welsh language medium as well as staff and students learning Welsh that encourages engagement and participation with the language.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>									
Other										
39. The consistent and highly-effective organisation and management of placement activity across the institution.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							

Providers' affirmations

Affirmations	Aberyst.	Bangor	Cardiff Met.	Cardiff	Grŵp Llandrillo	Neath Port	Swansea	Wales Trinity	South Wales	Wrexham Glyndŵr
Quality assurance processes										
1. The development of the Quality Assurance Handbook in order to centralise the policies and procedures relevant to quality assurance in an accessible manner.						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
2. The steps being taken to map quality processes to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education in order to ensure practices are continually reviewed and monitored to ensure ongoing alignment with sector expectations.						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
3. The steps being taken to implement a revised annual monitoring process that enables a more responsive approach to the review and enhancement of student experience.				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Use of data										
4. The progress being made in the effective collection and use of HE data in order to inform decision making and evaluation.						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
5. The significant progress in the use of data sources to support the student experience.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							
6. The measures being taken to address deficiencies that the University has identified in the accessibility and use of data for decision-making, evaluation and review purposes.							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Partner institutions										
7. The work being undertaken by the Doctoral College to ensure comparability of student experience across the multi-campus locations and modes of study.								<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
8. The actions being taken to address concerns raised by students on a franchised programme in one further education partner in relation to			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							

Affirmations	Aberyst.	Bangor	Cardiff Met.	Cardiff	Grŵp Llandrillo	Neath Port	Swansea	Wales Trinity	South Wales	Wrexham Glyndŵr
the quality of their learning experience.										
9. The steps being taken to address the deficiencies in the provision at MDIS Tashkent.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
Doctoral students										
10. The steps being taken to further develop and expand the current doctoral academy in order to strengthen the postgraduate research community.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							
11. The development of the Doctoral School to support a distinct and consistent PGR experience across all schools.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
12. The programme of work the University is undertaking to develop a new digital system that will allow enhanced institutional oversight of the experience of postgraduate research students.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>									
Students as co-creators										
13. The steps taken to further engage the diverse student body that enables the Grŵp to work in partnership with students and to enhance the student learning experience.					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
14. The steps being taken to work with taught students as partners in the co-development, management and evaluation of their student experience.										<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Assessment										
15. Implementation of the Assessment Framework to ensure the consistency of assessment across the University.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
16. The steps being taken by the University to enhance policy and practice in academic assessment and feedback in response to issues it has identified in student responses to internal and external survey data.							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Other										
17. The steps being taken to review the institutional peer observation policy to ensure its full implementation and the systematic							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

Affirmations	Aberyst.	Bangor	Cardiff Met.	Cardiff	Grŵp Llandrillo	Neath Port	Swansea	Wales Trinity	South Wales	Wrexham Glyndŵr
capture and dissemination of good practice and areas for development.										
18. The steps being taken to ensure that external examiner reports clearly distinguish between the University's on-campus provision and that delivered at each partner college.									<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
19. The actions being taken with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol to increase higher education Welsh medium vocational opportunities across the region.					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
20. The developments being undertaken to ensure a linear, streamlined higher education admissions process through the role of the Higher Education Admissions and Careers Officer.					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
21. The steps being undertaken by the University to ensure programme specifications are kept up to date.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>									

Providers' recommendations

Recommendations	Aberyst.	Bangor	Cardiff Met.	Cardiff	Grŵp Llandrillo	Neath Port	Swansea	Wales Trinity	South Wales	Wrexham Glyndŵr
Postgraduate students										
1. Develop a robust system that ensures that all current and future postgraduate research students undertaking or supporting teaching undergo appropriate training.								<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
2. 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.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							
3. To ensure there is a regular evaluation of the PGR student experience.										<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Partner institutions										
4. Involve students from collaborative partner institutions in the development of teach-out plans when closing courses.								<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
5. That arrangements for supporting student representation in partnership institutions are applied consistently and effectively.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							
6. That the University ensures that its requirements for handling academic complaints and appeals are fully understood by all partners and that these requirements are clearly and consistently communicated to all partner students.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							
Other										
7. Develop a cohesive strategic approach to improve highly-skilled professional employability outcomes across all programmes.								<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
8. Formalise and implement appropriate training, for established academic staff, in the Grŵp's quality processes to ensure they are applied in a consistent manner.					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					

9. Ensure effective University oversight of the uptake and engagement of staff and students with the requirements of the personal tutoring system.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>									
10. Implement a system that ensures institutional oversight for the approval of external examiners for research degree awards.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>									
11. Ensure all students receive timely assessment feedback in line with University requirements.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>									
12. None		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

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